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LETTER: Audism is an -ism close to home

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Over the weekend of June 23 and 24, members of the Virginia Deaf community, with friends, families, and supporters rallied on the streets of Staunton to protest VSDB's Superintendent, and her lack of leadership among other sorry performances at the school. On those two days, the old, old label "Deafness is invisible" no longer applied. Deaf folk were very visible.

Among the signs carried by protesters were ones stating, undeniably, that there must be "Zero Tolerance for Audism." Citizens who weren't downtown during the rally, might well ask whatever is that? Deaf people should know what it is; we experience it far too often and want it gone.

The term "Audism" was coined in 1975 by American communication and language researcher Tom L. Humphries to describe discrimination against persons who are Deaf.

An Audist is someone who has been around Deaf or hard of hearing people, probably for years and has been educated about appropriate expectations or perspectives of the Deaf community. The Audist knows the difference between discrimination against or prejudice toward Deaf or hard of hearing people, yet continues to act superior, looks down upon, and makes negative comments about, people who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

Audism occurs at all levels of society and is as unacceptable as any other form of bigotry. The protesters and their signs calling for Zero tolerance were spot on. This is not what people want from the Superintendent of any school for the Deaf, any business hiring Deaf folk, any service providers, anywhere. Now we know the word, let's put a stop to what it represents.

Rachel Bavister

Staunton