

**Question for written answer E-005530/2012
to the Commission**

Rule 117

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Subject: Rights of deaf passengers in air travel

A group of four young deaf people booked an airline ticket online. Soon after they received an e-mail stating that 'the airline company has made it known that in order to be able to guarantee safety on this flight, a maximum of two hearing-impaired unescorted individuals will be permitted.' They were then offered three options: 1) They must be accompanied by an escort; 2) At least two of the passengers must be able to hear sufficiently in order to be able to travel safely (in other words, these travellers must be able to hear sufficiently in order to be able to follow spoken instructions from cabin personnel, and therefore be able to guarantee their own safety and that of their fellow passengers); 3) Rebook the flight for another time for two of the passengers; a minimum rebooking fee of EUR 70 per person would apply in this case.

These young people do not wish to be escorted given that they are capable of moving around independently and are not restricted in terms of mobility. They wish to travel together and do not understand that they are being refused for safety reasons. This is apparently not an isolated case.

In view of the above, can the Commission answer the following:

1. Is the Commission aware of similar refusals? Has it (or Solvit) received any similar complaints?
2. How does the Commission evaluate this situation in light of Provision (EC) No 261/2004 and Provision (EC) No 1107/2006? Does it consider the supplied reason (safety) as valid and proportional? If yes, why? If not, why not? Can the necessary instructions not be communicated in a different manner?
3. Does the Commission recognise that this case illustrates a possible 'loophole' in the existing legislation?
4. Will the Commission take this matter into consideration within the scope of the current review of the relevant legislation, with the objective of introducing the necessary improvements to avoid similar situations in the future? What does the Commission wish to propose in concrete terms?
5. How does the Commission assess the fact that passengers are asked to indicate whether they are deaf/hearing-impaired? Is this in accordance with legislation? Can passengers be obliged to do this?
6. Can the travel agent/airline company file a complaint against the passengers if they do not indicate whether they are deaf/hearing-impaired at the time of booking?