

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS,
APPROVING IN PART, CONCURRING IN PART**

Re: *Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities (CC Docket No. 98-67, CG Docket No.03-123)*

When Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act more than twelve years ago, it directed the Commission to do everything we could to ensure that those with disabilities have access to functionally equivalent services so that all of America's citizens can participate fully in our society. I support today's item because, consistent with this vision, we take positive steps to update our TRS requirements. I also support our efforts to seek comment on the impact of new technological developments on TRS. As the pace of innovation quickens, we should commit to reviewing our TRS requirements with ever greater frequency.

I must concur in part rather than approve *en toto* because I believe that this item delays unnecessarily the start of effective national TRS outreach efforts. Three years ago, the Commission tentatively concluded that a nationwide awareness campaign would improve TRS by publicizing its availability more broadly than the limited bill inserts and directory listings required under our current rules. The Commission noted that our current rules have not effectively ensured that callers are aware of TRS and concluded that this lack of awareness was adversely affecting the quality of TRS. For example, we found that callers using relay service experience an unacceptably large number of hang-ups because people receiving TRS calls are not familiar with the service. Our record also reflected that many employment opportunities are not extended to individuals with hearing disabilities because employers are uncomfortable using, or are unwilling to use, TRS for business transactions. That is surely a problem when we are talking about a group experiencing over 50%, in many areas 75%, unemployment. Against this background, the Commission determines that we need more comment before embarking on a national awareness campaign. This timidity is not warranted by either the record or the statute. We have ample support to begin a nationwide outreach effort right now and we ought to be doing exactly that.

While we take steps forward today, we have much more to do. The Commission needs to complete its Section 255 proceeding on accessibility to equipment and services. We need to address compatibility problems between wireless phones and hearing aids and we need to encourage a robust dialogue between telecommunications companies and the hearing and speech impaired communities that rely on their products and services. These issues affect all of us—not only the millions of Americans with disabilities, but also the millions more who could communicate with these citizens and whose lives would be improved as their lives are improved.

Thank you to the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau and the Disabilities Rights Office for their leadership on this item. I look forward to continuing our work together to resolve these issues.