

Separate Statement of Commissioner Michael J. Copps

Re: *Section 68.4 of the Commission's Rules Governing Hearing Aid-Compatible Telephones, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (July 10, 2003).*

We all often talk about the power of technology to make American's lives better. We talk about the transformative potential of innovation and communications advances. We all recognize that it is the duty of this Commission to work to make technology available to all Americans.

This duty comes into sharp focus in Orders like this. The first speech I gave as a FCC Commissioner was in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, at the 14th International Conference of Telecommunications for the Deaf. This is where our responsibilities in this area became clear to me. I, along with my colleagues, recognize the unique challenges faced by hard-of-hearing Americans and the unique possibilities presented by communications technologies to this community.

Congress also recognizes these challenges and opportunities, and has told us that we must make communications technologies accessible by people with disabilities. So my goal as a FCC Commissioner is to follow the directive of Congress and to help bring the best, most accessible and cost-effective telecommunications system in the world to our people – and I mean all of our people. That means that each and every American should have access to the wonders of wireless telecommunications.

Today we take an important step toward that goal. We adopt the ANSI performance standard and phase in a requirement that mobile phones meet this standard. In two years 25 percent of all Tier One carriers' phones must comply. On the day that the analog standard disappears a little under five years from now, hard-of-hearing Americans will find that 50 percent of all wireless phones are compatible with their hearing aids. And we don't stop there. Three years from now, when we have more information on how implementation is progressing, we commit to begin a proceeding to explore setting additional benchmarks above 50 percent. Importantly, we state that our goal is 100 percent compliance. We have a long way to go. But this is a good start.

With this action our Commission adds to a list of actions the past Commission took to promote accessibility. The previous Commission wrote new rules to ensure that communications products and services are accessible to those with disabilities, as Congress directed, in Section 255; overhauled and updated our Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS) rules to provide for faster, more effective relay services; established 711 for relay services so that consumers will no longer need to remember different TRS numbers and TRS users will be able to put one number on their business cards, thereby making it easier for people to call them; and took action on captioning to ensure that everyone has access to televised information, including, most importantly, warnings about emergency situations. This Commission has maintained and in some instances built upon these actions, and I'm happy to say that we continue this trend today.

Furthermore, I want to recognize the dedication of the wireless industry to serving people with disabilities. Over my tenure here I've seen a new and vigorous commitment by manufacturers and carriers. These manufacturers and the carriers are the ones who will make this Order work, and their recent performance has been commendable.

I also want to congratulate the wide range of organizations that represent people with hearing loss. They have been pushing the Commission to take action for years and years on this proceeding. They represent their community ably and professionally. And I want to stress again the importance of this Commission always making special efforts to reach out to our disabilities communities whose resources are stretched thin but who are so profoundly affected by so many of the proceedings before the FCC.

Finally, I want to thank my colleagues and the staff for their hard work on this item. They were flexible and open to compromise. I appreciate that and think that in the end the process of working together led to a far better Order.

Thank you.