

**Remarks of  
Michael K. Powell  
Chairman, Federal Communications Commission  
At the  
FCC Summit: Emergency Communications and Homeland Security  
Working with the Disability Community  
Washington, D.C.  
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Good afternoon. Thank you all for gathering here today to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing the communications industry and regulators in meeting the needs of the disability community in emergency situations. These are formidable tasks, but from what we've heard today, it sounds like everyone is ready to tackle them. I appreciate the insight offered by each of the panelists in exploring how we can work cooperatively to identify and implement solutions.

I'd also like to thank the Consumer Advisory Committee, the Intergovernmental Advisory Committee, the Homeland Security Policy Council and Dane Snowden and his staff for putting this Summit together.

Through their efforts and your efforts, we can identify what needs to be done to improve the disability community's access to reliable information in emergencies of all kinds. You have my commitment that the FCC will continue to address this challenge on behalf of our citizens.

Over the last two and a half years, the FCC has worked tirelessly to institute actions to help protect our homeland. We created a Homeland Security Policy Council to coordinate the Commission's Homeland Security initiatives both internally and externally. We re-chartered the Network Reliability and Interoperability Council, one of our Federal Advisory Committees, to focus on Homeland Security and created the Media Security and Reliability Council, to bring together representatives of the media industry for purposes of focusing on emergency communication and coordination plans.

And we made Homeland Security one of the six pillars of the Commission's Strategic Plan, charging each of the Commission's Bureaus and Offices to integrate a Homeland Security focus into its work to enhance the security and reliability of the communications infrastructure or enhance emergency response through communications. Finally, we created an Office of Homeland Security in the Enforcement Bureau to provide consolidated support for the Commission in meeting our Homeland Security and emergency preparedness responsibilities.

These efforts are intended to aid and protect all Americans. Today, through this Summit, we reinforce that commitment by focusing on efforts to ensure the disability community has equal access to emergency communications.

According to the Department of Commerce, one in five Americans is disabled and one in ten is severely disabled. Some 50 million people are inflicted with some type of long lasting condition or disability, 3 million of which have sensory disabilities involving sight or hearing.

These figures underscore the need for Congress, the FCC, the communications industry, and the disability community to work together cooperatively to ensure access to communications services, especially during emergencies. The needs of this community cannot -- and will not -- be left behind as the Commission works to implement its Homeland Security measures.

In addition to making Homeland Security a central pillar of the FCC's work, we have undertaken several steps to improve access to communications services by the disability community and we will continue this mission.

For example, last year, the Commission modified its rules under the Hearing Aid Compatibility Act of 1988 to ensure that persons who are hard of hearing or deaf will be able to better communicate using wireless devices.

We have also worked to improve Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS), which enable individuals with hearing or speech disabilities to utilize the telephone system and communicate with others.

In addition to celebrating the ten-year anniversary of nationwide TRS last year, the FCC required all telecommunications carriers in the U.S., wireline, wireless and payphone providers, to provide 711 TRS dialing to ensure that TRS users will be able to initiate a call from any telephone, anywhere in the United States, without having to remember and dial a seven or ten-digit access number.

And in 2003, we identified Internet Protocol relay service as a recognizable TRS service, allowing people who have difficulty hearing or speaking to communicate with anyone in the world through an Internet connection rather than a TTY and a telephone.

Through our proceedings on Telecommunications Relay Services and the transmission of Emergency 911 services over TTY, we are readily addressing the needs of the disability community, but we acknowledge that there is more work to be done.

I am proud to report that we continue to be active in reminding broadcast outlets and multi-channel video program distributors of their obligation to provide captioning for emergency information.

In addition, service providers and equipment manufacturers continue to make strides in making their equipment accessible to the disabled community, including systems (such as NTS, the Nxi Text Service) that will notify users in an emergency and provide instructions to evacuate or respond.

Today's meeting is an historic opportunity to listen and learn about the issues facing the disability community, the communications industry, and federal regulators with regard to emergency communications. I appreciate your insight and candor in discussing the challenges that the disability community faces and look forward to not just continuing this important dialogue, but developing real world solutions.

Collectively, we must work to identify changes the Commission can make in its own rules and regulations and engage in increased outreach efforts to expedite improved access to emergency information.

Today's Summit has driven home the importance of the Commission's outreach program in informing the disability community and the communications industry of their rights and obligations. Equally important, today's Summit provided the Commission with an opportunity to listen and learn from the disability community and experts working in emergency communications. We will draw from your experience and insight as we create and enforce policies to ensure that all Americans -- including the disability community -- have equal access to communications services in an emergency.

Our collective efforts will continue to lead to effective change for all of our citizens. Thank you for your service and I look forward to continuing our discussions and actions.

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