

STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER
MICHAEL J. COPPS
Approving

RE: Section 68.4(a) of the Commission's Rules Governing Hearing Aid-Compatible Telephones (WT Docket No. 01-309).

I'm happy to support today's Order, which largely maintains our hearing aid compatibility rules as they apply to wireless phones and clarifies the Commission's continuing commitment to ensure access to digital wireless services by individuals with hearing loss. Strong and clear rules here are critical to accomplishing the statutory goal of ensuring that our Nation's telecommunications networks are accessible to Americans with hearing loss. We heard from consumers across the country about the importance of one of our rules in particular, the rule that requires retailers to make in-store testing of hearing aid compatible phones available upon request. We wisely decide to maintain this rule today, and explore whether we should extend it to retailers that are not owned or operated by wireless carriers.

We also alter our rules on the number of hearing aid compatible handsets that must be made available to customers. This change is the result of discussions between Self Help for the Hard of Hearing and CTIA. I'm hopeful that our new arrangement will benefit both consumers and carriers. I'd like to commend Brenda Battat of SHHH and Steve Largent of CTIA for the commitment their organizations have shown to working together. I've long advocated closer and more regular exchanges between advocates for Americans with disabilities and the communications industry; I'm glad these discussions appear to be bearing fruit; and I look forward to their continuation to ensure that the changes we make today lead to better access and bring no unintended consequence. I also look forward to the broadening of these kinds of discussions to other issues of mutual interest.