

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN KEVIN J. MARTIN

Re: *Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities*, Order (CC Docket No. 98-67, CG Docket No. 03-123), FCC 05-141

Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities, Report and Order (CG Docket No. 03-123, CC Docket No. 98-67), FCC 05-140

Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities, Order on Reconsideration (CC Docket No. 98-67, CG Docket No. 03-123), FCC 05-139

Closed Captioning of Video Programming Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc. Petition for Rulemaking, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (CG Docket No. 05-231), FCC 05-142

The items that we adopt today should improve the quality of life for individuals with hearing or speech disabilities. One of the critical functions of the Commission is to ensure that these individuals have access to communications technologies in the same manner as people without hearing or speech disabilities. Those consumers that rely on Telecommunications Relay Services and Closed Captioning Services must not be left out of the telecommunications revolution. In each of the orders adopted today, we take measures to fulfill our statutory goal of ensuring that every person has equal access to this nation's communications services.

The four items adopted today coincide with the upcoming 15th anniversary of President George H. W. Bush's signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) on July 26th and the recent 25th anniversary of closed captioning which occurred last March. With the passage of the ADA in 1990, the Commission was directed to ensure that hearing or speech disabilities not pose an impediment to communication. I take this charge very seriously. Accessing communication services is vital to the ability of the individuals with disabilities to participate fully in society. The ADA specifically requires the Commission to ensure that Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS) "are available, to the extent possible and in the most efficient manner, to hearing-impaired and speech-impaired individuals in the United States." In honor of the 15th anniversary of this very important statute, we adopt several items that make TRS more accessible to this community.

During the past 15 years, we have seen the evolution of TRS. Traditional TTY service over regular phone lines has evolved into IP Relay and Video Relay Services (VRS) used over Internet connections. VRS permits users to participate in near real-time conversations in the users' primary language, American Sign Language (ASL). Because

of these features, its popularity in the deaf and hard of hearing community has soared. For example, the minutes of use of VRS have increased ten-fold in the past two years and are continuing to grow at a phenomenal rate.

With the steps we take today, we expand the reach of the TRS fund to compensate VRS translations between spoken Spanish and ASL as well as two-line captioned phone service. In addition, we take an important step to achieving adequate service quality of VRS by, for the first time, imposing speed of answer and hours of service requirements. Just as a hearing person can pick up the phone and immediately place a call, a person with a disability should be able to reach his or her VRS provider to place a call without experiencing unreasonable delays. We also begin a rulemaking on whether our closed captioning rules are achieving our goal of making video programming accessible to the millions of deaf and hard of hearing Americans, and we ask whether any revisions should be made to make these rules more effective.

The Commission is more committed than ever to ensuring that the goals of the ADA are achieved. The actions we take today join the many others that the Commission has taken over the years to eradicate the barriers that stand in the way of functional equivalency. Functional equivalency means individuals with disabilities having access to the same services as everyone else. This equal access is vital to accessing jobs, education, public safety, and simple communications with family, friends, and neighbors.

Although there is still more to do in order to achieve functional equivalence, I am proud of the items adopted today. I want to assure those of you with hearing or speech disabilities that we will not stop actively working to fulfill your need for functional equivalence. We could not have taken today's actions without your valuable input. We thank you for your participation in our proceedings and look forward to working with you and the service providers to come up with solutions to the next set of challenges that we intend to tackle. It is by working together that we can best ensure that the tremendous advances in communications are enjoyed by *all* Americans.