

**STATEMENT OF  
CHAIRMAN JULIUS GENACHOWSKI**

Re: *Amendment of the Commission's Rules Governing Hearing Aid-Compatible Mobile Handsets, WT Docket No. 07-250.*

Today we take important steps in our ongoing effort to ensure that Americans with disabilities have access to modern communications technology. This is part of our broader mission to bring the benefits of broadband and other modern communications to all Americans. It is almost befitting of our recent celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, an act that has sought to achieve full integration, independence and self-sufficiency of all persons with disabilities in our democracy, our economy and in other facets of our society.

This item addresses the challenges faced by the 8 million Americans who use hearing aids. The Commission's actions today will help Americans with hearing loss have meaningful access to the most exciting and innovative wireless communications devices on the market.

We adopt today an unprecedented agency Statement of Policy that emphasizes to developers of new technologies the necessity of considering and planning for hearing aid compatibility at the earliest stages of the product design process. For too many years, Americans who have hearing loss have faced the uphill battle of attempting to obtain hearing aid compatibility long after essential communications devices completed their development cycle and went on the market. By turning the collective focus to the development stage, innovators and entrepreneurs can account for compatibility issues *before* devices are produced. This is an important change, which will result in real benefits to Americans with hearing loss.

To ensure our policies will yield real-world results, I am pleased to announce that the FCC will convene a roundtable of industry and disability group leaders to renew the collaborative process to address the challenges of hearing aid compatibility up front in the development process.

Today's item does something else. It sets the stage for some of the latest wireless phones – such as the iPhone – to meet hearing aid compatibility standards. It does so in a way designed to incentivize the broadest possible innovation and investment. As a result of positive discussions with both industry and the hearing loss community, the Commission has refocused the *de minimis* exception to our hearing aid compatibility rules on the small companies and new entrants it was originally designed to protect, while creating appropriate transition periods and an alternative route to compliance for larger manufacturers who develop innovative devices.

The bottom line: what we do today will ensure as quickly as possible that a wider range of smartphones will be usable by people with hearing aids.

I thank the staff for their hard work and collaboration on this item, and my colleagues for working together to tackle this important issue.