



NEWS

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.
See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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FCC RAISES STANDARDS GOVERNING PHONE RELAY SERVICE FOR PEOPLE WITH SPEECH DISABILITIES

Improvements of “Speech-to-Speech” Relay Service Will Increase User Satisfaction; Further Notice Explores Changes to Improve Efficiency of Service

Washington, D.C. – The Federal Communications Commission today raised the standards for providers of Speech-to-Speech (STS) Relay Service in order to improve the experience for persons with a speech disability who need the service in order to make telephone calls using their own voice or an assistive voice device.

Speech-to-speech uses specially trained operators – Communications Assistants, or “CAs” – to relay the conversation back and forth between the individual with the speech disability and the other party to the call. Communications Assistants are trained to understand a variety of speech disorders, which enables them to repeat what the caller says in a manner that makes the caller’s words clear and understandable to the called party.

The order amends certain mandatory minimum standards to improve Speech-to-Speech TRS, including:

- **Increasing the time a CA must stay with a call.** For each STS call lasting for 20 minutes or longer, an STS CA must stay with the call for a minimum of 20 minutes before transferring the call to another CA. This increases the current minimum period before such a transfer may be made from 15 to 20 minutes. Establishing effective communication between an STS user and a CA can require a period of adjustment. Extending the length of time a CA must stay with a call will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the communications by reducing the number of instances an STS user would need to re-establish communication with another CA.
- **Muting option.** Providers must offer STS users the option to mute their voices during an STS call. Because some users are uncomfortable with having their voices heard by the other party to the call, this function will give users the option to have the called party hear only the CA’s voice.
- **Dialing 711 to initiate STS calls.** STS callers who dial 711 (the TRS dialing code) must have the same ease of reaching an STS CA as users of other types of TRS.

The new requirements will go into effect 60 days after their publication in the Federal Register.

In addition to the order, the FCC issued a further notice of proposed rulemaking, seeking comments on:

- **Whether to contract for a national STS outreach coordinator to conduct all STS outreach and to eliminate the current per-minute outreach subsidy to STS providers.** Similar action has improved efficiencies for the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Program and will be implemented for the Video Relay Service (VRS) and Internet Protocol (IP) Relay Programs.
- **Whether to adopt consumer eligibility, registration and verification for STS** to ensure that only those who qualify use the service.
- **Whether to adopt other recommendations made by consumers to improve STS for its users,** including the use of caller profiles that help a communications assistant know the communication preferences of an STS user in advance of a call and the need for a federal advisory committee dedicated to considering STS issues.
- **Whether to amend the rules to specify that certain TRS mandatory minimum standards do not apply to STS,** including CA competency in typing and spelling and use of the ASCII and Baudot formats that are used in TTY transmissions.

Learn more about Speech-to-Speech Relay Service at <http://www.fcc.gov/guides/speech-speech-relay-service>.

Action by the Commission July 19, 2013, by Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 13-101). Acting Chairwoman Clyburn, Commissioners Rosenworcel and Pai with Acting Chairwoman Clyburn, Commissioners Rosenworcel and Pai issuing statements.

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