

**STATEMENT OF
ACTING CHAIRWOMAN MIGNON CLYBURN**

Re: *Speech-to-Speech (STS) and Internet Protocol (IP) Speech-to-Speech Telecommunications Relay Services; Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities*, CG Docket Nos. 08-15 and 03-123

Today we mark the eve of the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act in three distinct ways. First, as you have just heard, we are improving the service that allows people with speech disabilities to communicate through telephone networks. This is another step toward fulfilling the promise of Title IV of the ADA, which requires access by people with hearing or speech disabilities to our telephone system through telecommunications relay services. Second, our Consumer Bureau will release a Public Notice seeking comment on a request to update our hearing aid compatibility standards, which will allow people with hearing loss to have better volume control on wireline phones. Finally, later this morning, we will hear from our staff about the Commission's implementation of another landmark law, the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act. The CVAA is already ensuring that all Americans with disabilities are able to use a host of the latest communications and video programming technologies currently available to the general public.

The Speech-to-Speech, or "STS" item before us highlights a unique service that allows those with speech disabilities to connect to others using the phone network and specially trained communications assistants. The Commission first mandated STS in 2000 as a means of fulfilling our charge under the ADA, to ensure that the nation's relay services make use of modern technologies.

In the years that followed, the Commission has received requests and proposals for improving this critical service, and today, we answer these requests by improving service standards for those using phone services.

By requiring communication assistants to stay with each STS call for a minimum of 20 minutes, we lessen the disruption that sometimes results when assistants are timed out from a call before it is concluded. It generally takes a few minutes for a communications assistant to gain a full understanding of the speech patterns of a person with a speech disability, especially if names and technical terms are used during a conversation. Reducing the number of times that these assistants must change during a call will result in greater functional equivalency for the user and will allow these calls to be processed more efficiently. Similarly, our requirement for STS providers to offer users the option of having their voices muted during a call will minimize disruption to the conversational flow of the call. Finally, by ensuring that consumers who access STS by dialing 711 are able to promptly reach a communication assistant, we will make it easier for them to use these services.

We also seek comment on other ways we can improve STS. We particularly remain concerned that despite considerable outreach funding that has been provided over the past

several years, there are many potential STS users who could benefit from, but remain unaware of, this service. The proposal to centralize STS outreach efforts through a single, national outreach coordinator is another step in improving the Commission's stewardship of the TRS Fund. Our goal is to efficiently reach and educate a greater portion of the population of Americans who could benefit from this service. We also ask how best to register, certify and verify STS users, which builds on our recent actions on video relay services to curb waste, fraud, and abuse. There should be no doubt about our unwavering commitment to a sustainable Fund supporting these services.

Finally, we are aware that a new form of STS, which uses video technology over broadband to allow the communication assistant to see the STS user as he or she is speaking, is now being provided by certain state TRS programs. We understand from some of the petitioners in this proceeding, that having the ability to see the STS caller's facial expressions, gestures, and lip movements – as well as cue cards that the caller could hold up to show names and other difficult-to-pronounce words – can help the communications assistant to better understand, and re-voice, for the STS user. We will be opening a second STS proceeding in the coming months, to seek comment on this new form of STS, as well as other ways that Internet-based technologies can help improve this service.

I am so pleased to announce these new rules, which bring us closer to functional equivalence for Americans with speech disabilities. STS relay provides an invaluable service to these often overlooked members of our community, and enables them to participate more fully in American life. I wish to acknowledge the extraordinary work of Dr. Bob Segalman, founder of STS, whose ingenuity has enabled people with speech disabilities across the country to enjoy independence and privacy when using the telephone. Unfortunately, Bob could not be here with us today as he is based in California, but we hope that he is watching our live web feed. We know that he is with us in spirit. Additionally, I want to express appreciation to Rebecca Ladew, a local Speech-to-Speech advocate, who has served on some of our advisory committees. Bob and Rebecca, your commitment to these issues is unparalleled, and we thank you for the work that you have done to make it possible for people with speech disabilities to have seamless communication.

Of course, today and next week's ADA celebration are milestones, but by no means the end of the road. So much more remains to be done to ensure that people with disabilities are full participants in this communications revolution. I thank my fellow Commissioners for joining me as we move further toward this most important goal.

I want to thank the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau for its outstanding work to ensure that individuals with speech disabilities have full access to our communications system, and for all your efforts to fulfill our obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act.