

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Speech-to-Speech 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, 03-123, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Hearing (July 19, 2013)

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, functional equivalency has been the foundation of our telecommunications relay service policies. Functional equivalency may sound like the kind of regulatory lingo that only a lawyer could love. But for millions of Americans with hearing and speech impairments, it means that they have the right and ability to pick up the phone, reach out and connect, and participate more fully in the world.

Today, more than one million Americans, including an increasing number of veterans suffering from brain injuries, live with speech disabilities. These disabilities can make it difficult to communicate and hard to make even a simple phone call. But the Commission's speech-to-speech telecommunications relay service is designed to help. Our rules permit people with speech disabilities to speak with a trained communications assistant who then relays the words of the speech-to-speech user to the called party. It means that people with speech disabilities can do the things so many of us take for granted—pick up the phone and seek emergency help; secure a job; make a doctor's appointment; follow up with a child's teacher; and connect with family and friends.

But as good as this program is, there is room for improvement. So today we take steps to improve speech-to-speech services. Specifically, to limit disruption for users, we require communications assistants to stay on the line for at least 20 minutes before switching the caller to a new assistant. At the same time, we permit a speech-to-speech communications assistant to transfer a call to another assistant if he or she is unable to understand the speech-to-speech user. Speech-to-speech users also may now mute their voices on a call to reduce listener confusion. In addition, we seek comment on ways to increase awareness of the speech-to-speech program so it can help more people with speech disabilities communicate effectively. The net result should be more dignity for users, more clarity for communications assistants, and more effective calls.

Thank you to the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau for your work today and for your continued commitment to functional equivalency.