

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MIGNON L. CLYBURN**

Re: *Implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, Section 105, Relay Services for Deaf-Blind Individuals*, CG Docket No. 10-210.

In 2007, actor and producer James Paul co-directed a documentary called *Through Your Eyes*, the story of Sophie, Emma, and Zoe Dunn, the nation's only known deaf-blind triplets who lived in Silver, Texas. If you have never heard of Silver, it is an unincorporated community 255 miles west of Austin. After spending time with the then-six-year-old girls, he found the three to be intelligent but isolated. "They just need a way to communicate with the world," Paul said back then.

While I am pleased to say that technologies exist to help the Dunn triplets, they can be, and most often are, cost prohibitive. For example, a deaf-blind individual who is not able to fully use a computer, tablet, or smartphone, without a refreshable braille display, will encounter costs that can run as high as \$5,000 per unit. Imagine trying to afford one of those devices on even a middle-class budget. Imagine being the Dunn family and having to multiply that by three. Then, imagine trying to learn how to use these devices without being able to hear and see.

Though estimates range from 45,000 to 700,000 of the number of Americans who are deaf-blind – a relatively small number in a nation of some 320 million people – Congress wisely chartered, and the FCC brought to life, the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program, more colloquially known as iCanConnect. This program brings life-changing communications technologies to those who struggle the most when it comes to interacting with rest of the world.

For a number of years, we have judiciously piloted this program and it has paid multiple dividends. The lives of many low-income deaf-blind individuals have been greatly improved, and now it is time to make this extremely successful program permanent.

On my #ConnectingCommunities tour, I had the privilege of visiting one of the participants in the iCanConnect pilot, the Perkins School for the Blind. There I visited a class taught by Kate Crohan, who on that day was helping students learn how to use this technology. Logan, a student in the class, told me how he used his braille notetaker not only for school, but to email friends—basic tasks most of us take completely for granted. Tasks that are opening doors for him, and will do the same for thousands more.

iCanConnect is a shining example of how good legislation and sound regulatory policies are bridging gaps, connecting communities and improving lives. The program and this Order have my full support.

This Order is a reflection of the things we have learned over the years as well as the hard work by FCC staff and others across the country, who are helping ensure that deaf-blind individuals have the means and ability to connect and communicate just like everyone else. We adopt a permanent framework that carefully balances the need for flexibility and accountability, which ensures that those precious dollars are not only well-spent but that unnecessary administrative burdens are minimized. As with the pilot, the permanent program supports evaluations, training, and equipment for deaf-blind individuals. And, in order to increase program efficiency as more people participate in iCanConnect, we initiate a process to create a database that will serve as a clearinghouse for reporting and reimbursement claims.

I would like to once again thank the dedicated staff of the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau for their tireless work. You continue to make the lives of individuals with disabilities less isolating and you continue to ensure that their world is a more connected one. Your dedication is reflected in this item, and for that and more, we are all grateful.