

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER AJIT PAI**

Re: *Implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, Section 105, Relay Services for Deaf-Blind Individuals*, CG Docket 10-210.

Like many ten-year-olds, Ava enjoys dancing, playing basketball, and chatting with friends. But unlike most kids her age, Ava has profound deafness and limited vision as a result of Usher Syndrome. Through iCanConnect (formally, the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program), Ava can now hear her iPad thanks to an audio cable that plugs into her cochlear implants. She now knows when someone calls thanks to a signaler that vibrates when the home phone rings. As Ava put it, this equipment “makes me feel like everybody else.”¹

Ava isn’t alone. Two years ago, 13-year-old Nolan received an iPad and an iPhone with specialized communication software. As a result of being born with CHARGE, a genetic condition that causes complex birth defects, Nolan has colobomas—basically, gaps in the structure of his eyes—and his speech can be difficult to understand. Nolan’s mother described the technology he now uses as a “game changer.” He regularly talks with family and friends online.²

Or consider Jose. When he was 46, Jose lost his sight and suffered debilitating hearing loss after a drunk driver crashed into him. Six years later, he relies on specialized equipment and software from iCanConnect to communicate with others and care for himself. He has said that “[m]y life has been brought back to almost like it was before. [iCanConnect] gave me the will to go out and do things,” including returning to school to complete his GED.³

As these stories illustrate, iCanConnect is an important program that can change lives. Indeed, the pilot program has already helped 3,731 deaf-blind individuals. That’s why I am glad we’re making it permanent. We are largely keeping the pilot program intact to build off its past successes, a decision I support. And we are making a few refinements to smooth future administration.

I want to thank the Disability Rights Office and the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau for working tirelessly to implement this essential program. And I look forward to working with you to reform our other programs so that the promise of functionally equivalent communications for all Americans can be soon realized.

¹ iCanConnect, Ten-year-old with Usher Syndrome Connects with Friends and Family Through iCanConnect, <http://bit.ly/1RnFi5g> (Mar. 16, 2016).

² iCanConnect, Michigan Teen Stays in Touch with Friends Around the Country Through iCanConnect, <http://bit.ly/1PoXtLC> (Nov. 30, 2015).

³ iCanConnect, Georgia Man Regains Communication, Pursues Dreams with iCanConnect, <http://bit.ly/2aQhwmh> (June 25, 2015).