

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER AJIT PAI**

Re: *Improvements to Benchmarks and Related Requirements Governing Hearing Aid-Compatible Mobile Handsets*, WT Docket No. 15-285

In the 1870s, while working as a teacher for the deaf and hard of hearing, a young entrepreneur began experimenting with devices that could help his students hear and speak. As a result of that work, he invented a device that would change the way everyone communicates. That person was Alexander Graham Bell. The invention, of course, was the telephone.

It is a fitting tribute to Bell that we update our hearing-aid compatibility rules today to ensure that people with hearing loss have greater access to new, innovative telecommunications technologies. We do this in the short term by increasing the percentage of wireless handsets that must be hearing-aid compatible. And we do this in the long term by setting up a process that will enable us to decide whether 100% of handsets should be hearing-aid compatible.

Our ability to take these important steps is due in no small part to the leadership shown by the hearing loss community, including Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Hearing Loss Association of America, and the National Association of the Deaf. These groups hammered out a consensus with industry groups, and all of these parties deserve to be recognized for their hard work.

As we move forward in this proceeding, I am glad that we are continuing to seek comment on ways that alternative technologies can serve the needs of consumers. With technology changing faster than ever, it is important that we help consumers with hearing loss leverage new apps, Bluetooth, or other technologies to meet their communications needs.

One way to do that is to make sure that our rules don't impede new products and services from entering the market. On this score, I'm glad that we are again teeing up the idea of putting ourselves on a shot clock. If an entrepreneur comes up with a new product or service that could better meet the needs of the hearing loss community, we should move quickly to decide whether that technology is consistent with the purposes underlying our hearing-aid-compatibility rules.

Turning back to Alexander Graham Bell: One of his students once remarked that he dedicated his life to remedying the "inhuman silence which separates and estranges." That student was Helen Keller, and she was right. Almost a century and a half later, the FCC does its small part to continue Bell's work by modernizing our hearing-aid-compatibility rules and ensuring that those with hearing loss are better able to end that silence.