

REMARKS OF KAREN PELTZ-STAUSS  
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AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY  
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Thank you so much for that kind introduction. It holds special significance for me, given Commissioner Rosenworcel's own valuable contributions to expanding disability access. Few leaders have been as committed to enfranchising people with disabilities as she – from her work in helping to secure passage of disability legislation on the Hill, to her role in ensuring its effective implementation at the Commission. It's always a privilege to work with the Commissioner on these issues and it's most definitely an honor to share the stage with her tonight.

I also want to thank my husband and children for all of their amazing support throughout my career. I'm so proud that each of them are in careers that are designed to make daily life easier and better for consumers and urban dwellers.

I am both honored and humbled to receive this award, and especially delighted to be in the esteemed company of Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan and California State Senator Richard Pan. I also have great admiration for the National Consumers League, and in particular, Sally Greenberg, who, with the support of the League's Board of Directors, has steadfastly worked to ensure that consumers are empowered to meet the challenges of emerging communications technologies.

I would also like to thank the Trumpeter Awards Dinner Committee, especially Bryan Tramont and Amy Sonderman, for putting together this lovely evening, as well as their support over the past few weeks.

I am humbled by the work of the award's namesake, Florence Kelley. Kelley's struggles for women's suffrage, civil rights, and decent working conditions stood for justice and equality, and most importantly, inclusion. These values – also reflected in the League's work to equip consumers with information they need to effectively acquire, use and protect the privacy of their communications -- appear as well in the struggles to ensure communications access by people with disabilities. We share a commitment to ensuring accessible, affordable and usable services for all Americans.

What does inclusion actually mean for people with disabilities? Communication services can open doors to education, information, jobs, commerce, entertainment, and government services. Being able to connect can break down not only physical, but attitudinal barriers for people with disabilities, promoting greater self-determination and integration into society.

But this can only happen if these technologies are designed to be accessible.

Most of us take for granted being able to use our smartphones, tablets, computers, and video devices to connect with friends and colleagues; go online for news, information and purchases; and watch TV programs. But these basic tasks that have become so routine to our daily lives have sometimes posed considerable challenges to people with disabilities.

Although people who were deaf or hard of hearing were able to follow the silent movies of the early 1900s, when talking movies and TV came along, they lost this access. Without closed captions, for the first 50 years of television in America, they couldn't watch shows like *All in the Family*, *Perry Mason*, or *Dr. Kildare*. This not only denied the entertainment these shows offered; it kept these Americans from understanding many cultural mores. I recall a deaf student in the 1980s coming to me for legal assistance: without access to TV crime shows, he didn't understand that he had waived his Miranda rights after an arrest for a minor crime. Another client was upset when a medical test came back negative: never having watched a show about doctors, she didn't realize that a negative outcome on a medical test was a good thing.

Let me share another example. And I realize I am truly dating myself with each of these. Think back to how a landline phone used to work. You picked it up and dialed it – initially with a rotary dial, and later with touch-tones. Easy for a person without sight because only the sense of touch was needed to dial. However, now think about the flat screens that perform multiple menu functions on smartphones. When these were first introduced, they weren't accessible to people who can't see and took away the telephone access they once had.

Another example. Try going home tonight and selecting a TV channel or recording a TV program with your eyes closed. Unless you have a brand new technology that uses audio to navigate program menus – soon to be required by the FCC – chances are you won't be able to do so . . . because everything you need to access is presented on an on-screen menu that requires sight.

Now, clearly, technological advances have improved our lives – and dramatically so. But staying ahead of the technological curve becomes a challenge when new innovations for the general public don't consider the needs of people with disabilities.

From the 1980s until my tenure at the FCC, I was fortunate to be part of a nationwide movement to end discrimination against people with disabilities, an effort that has been compared to the civil rights movements of the 60s and 70s. Our reward was a string of federal laws that require closed captioning, video description, access to mobile and video devices, and a host of other disability protections. Under Chairman Wheeler's strong leadership, the FCC has implemented these mandates by, for example, adopting rules for high quality captions, text-to-911 access, hearing aid compatibility, and the distribution of free communications devices to low income people who are both deaf and blind. A debt of thanks is owed to the Chairman, the Commissioners, and the incredible teams of FCC employees who have been so dedicated in their commitment to developing these safeguards.

In recent years, these laws have not only made the virtual world vastly more accessible for people with disabilities; they have also created a greater awareness of the needs of this

population. While there is still room for improvement – for example, many websites remain inaccessible to people with vision loss – more than ever before, the private sector is incorporating accessible features as they design their products, so that everyone can use them at the time they are rolled out to the general public. This changing landscape is perhaps, in part due to the availability of software-based solutions and third party apps, which now make it far easier to incorporate accessibility solutions. A rapidly aging population with declining hearing, vision, and cognition, has been adding to the demand for such access. As a result, there are now greater options to communicate in text, voice, and video, and to access products and services through audio, tactile, and visual means, a result that ends up benefitting everyone.

This award shines a light on the importance of these efforts. Tomorrow's innovations hold tremendous promise for the increased productivity, self-sufficiency, and empowerment of people with disabilities. Our challenge is to make sure that the gains achieved to date are not threatened by the technologies of the future. I thank the League for its leadership in highlighting this as an important consumer protection and again want to express my gratitude for this incredible honor.