

Remarks of Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn (as prepared)

Disability Advisory Committee Meeting

Washington, D.C.

June 16, 2017

Good morning, everyone. I would like to thank Elaine Gardner and the Commission's Disability Advisory Committee for inviting me to share some thoughts with you today.

The use of communications technology has not only become routine, it is an essential part of our everyday lives. However, as this group knows all too well, too many Americans remain unable to utilize our most innovative advancements to their fullest capabilities. We have accepted as one of our primary duties at the FCC, to ensure all members of the community have access to advanced communications services, so that they may meaningfully engage in social, political, and economic discourse.

Let me begin by expressing how pleased I am to see the FCC's Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau (CGB) move rapidly to certify states and territories for participation in the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program, also known as "iCanConnect." This program is essential in assisting low-income individuals who are deaf and blind gain access to communications services. As of July 1, iCanConnect will finally become a permanent program and thanks to the work of the Commission staff, iCanConnect will make an everlasting difference in the lives of millions of Americans.

But we can ill-afford to rest on this success because it is important that we continue to discuss where additional Commission action is necessary. In that vein, I will focus specifically on three proceedings that were circulated during the previous Administration, that if acted upon, can significantly improve the lives of those living with a disability.

First, it is imperative that we act to increase the number of hours of video described programming. In March 2016, as you know, the Commission adopted a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) that proposed increasing video described programming from 50 hours to 87.5 hours per calendar quarter. This would have expanded the availability of video described programming by 75 percent, allowing those who are blind or visually impaired, to immerse themselves in programming in a way that audio dialogue simply does not provide. Now my friends, it is time to act, and put this proposal into effect.

The Commission must also address improved accessibility of closed captioning. Last fall, the Commission teed up a proceeding that would have ensured consumers can readily find and control the display features associated with closed captioning. What good however, is closed captioning, if those that stand to benefit the most, cannot easily find and use all of its features? So once again, I think it is time we put this item back on circulation and take action expeditiously.

Third, we have an opportunity to improve how Americans with hearing loss, access wireline and wireless communications services. Currently on circulation is a proceeding that would revise the wireline volume control standards, to better support the auditory experience of

people with hearing loss. The Report & Order would also address application of hearing aid compatibility standards to handsets used with advanced communications services, which includes Voice over Internet Protocol, as well as the adoption of a requirement for volume control on wireless handsets, and the creation of a streamlined process for the implementation of hearing aid compatibility standards for both wireline and wireless handsets. I look forward to working with my colleagues to move forward with this proceeding.

Finally, I would like to remind everyone that the United States Access Board published a final rule in January of this year, with updates to both information and communication technology, covered by Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and Section 255 of the Communications Act. Although this rule went into effect on March 21st of this year, our compliance with the updated Section 255 guidelines are not enforceable until adopted by this agency. Thus, I urge the FCC majority to move forward within the coming year on a rulemaking that puts these guidelines into effect.

We cannot stand idly by as so many members of our communities are being left behind, because we did not move swiftly enough to enact policies that could improve their lives. The time to act is not tomorrow, next week, next month or next year. The time to act is now.

As always, it is a privilege to work with you, and I am grateful for your advocacy.

Thank you.