

Remarks of Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn
Disability Advisory Committee
Washington, D.C.
February 28, 2018

Good morning! Allow me to once again express my gratitude to each member of the Disability Advisory Committee for their dedicated service. You accepted this role because of your long-standing commitment to making the nation's communications services more accessible: On top of your regular jobs, without additional compensation, and with many of you serving for years. This agency has a lot to be proud of, because of you.

You have heard me speak about improving accessibility among all communications services, be it by telephone, online, or broadcasting and cable, over the past eight and a half years. The signing of the landmark *21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act* (CVAA) gave us the authority to ensure that our accessibility rules are now more closely aligned with the technologies people use each day.

But you also make sure, that we never rest on our laurels, because there is so much more left to do. I understand that important topics, including real-time text (RTT) implementation and deployment; technology transitions; emergency communications; and the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program will be covered today, which is why you have my unwavering support.

With more than 50 million people identified as having a disability in this country, it is critical that both legacy communications services and those new and emerging technologies are accessible to all. That is why I believe we must discuss these issues, not just when a rulemaking has "accessibility" in its title, but in each and every proceeding before the Commission. By this I mean, if a proceeding will impact the general public, we must include in that discussion, how those living with a disability will be impacted.

Take the recent dismantling of the FCC's net neutrality rules. A free and open internet ensures that a broadband provider cannot engage in paid prioritization, throttling, or blocking of legal content. How is that relevant here? In November, I shared the story of Alice Wong, who founded the Disability Visibility Project. In a video posted online, Alice discussed how the internet has helped her establish an online community among like-minded individuals and expressed that she felt eliminating net neutrality will widen the digital divide, particularly for those with disabilities. I do not have to convince this Committee just how much the internet has unleashed tremendous innovation in recent years, enabling more accessible services at a lower cost.

But what if one of those accessible services, competes with an application affiliated with a major broadband provider? Would the repeal of net neutrality, incent that broadband provider to favor its own service by providing faster speeds and at the same time slowing down access to that competing service? What if an accessible video communications service developed by a startup was blocked all together? You say these scenarios would never happen? My answer is to check out the documented track record of net neutrality violations over the past decade.

As we look further at our agency's policies, including the approval of recent technologies, I wish to highlight text-to-911. I was particularly pleased to read last week, that Maryland residents will soon have access to this vital service. For those who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, text-to-911 is a game changer, and I trust additional states will follow Maryland's lead.

I am also excited to hear, that many service providers and equipment manufacturers, have taken the lead in implementing Real Time Text (RTT). By replacing TTY technology with RTT, those who are deaf or hard of hearing, will have access to a real-time, text-based service, that is more modern and efficient.

In closing, I wish to thank Elaine Gardner for her dedicated service to the DAC and offer a warm welcome to Will Schell who assumes her role as the new Designated Federal Officer for the Committee.

Thank you again for allowing me to provide remarks this morning. Have a great meeting.