

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER BRENDAN CARR**

Re: *Misuse of Internet Protocol (IP) Captioned Telephone Service*, CG Docket No. 13-24;
Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities, CG Docket No. 03-123

The FCC has an obligation to ensure that telecommunications services are available to Americans with hearing loss. One way we do that is through the funding of IP CTS, which is a service that allows an individual who can speak, but who has difficulty hearing over the telephone, to use a phone and an IP-enabled device to simultaneously listen and read captions of the phone conversation.

The Commission's TRS Fund, which subsidizes the cost of IP CTS, serves vitally important purposes. It helps ensure that Americans with hearing loss do not lose out on the connectivity essential to contacting friends and family, calling for help in an emergency, or accessing employment opportunities.

In my time on the Commission, I have had the chance to meet with IP CTS providers and visit their call centers. I have spoken with dedicated call center employees, many of whom relayed stories of their own family members with hearing loss, and they pointed to them as their inspiration for entering this field of work. And I have heard from consumers who benefit from IP CTS.

Recognizing the significant role IP CTS plays in the hearing loss community makes it all the more important that we ensure the program is available for those who need it. But both the record here and my own experience indicates that scarce program dollars may be supporting at least some calls for which the parties do not need captions. So I am glad that we are launching this proceeding to help ensure that the limited funding continues to support calls for those Americans that rely on captions to communicate.

In this respect, I want to thank my colleagues for agreeing to seek comment on additional steps that could help identify and remedy the potential misuse of program dollars. Among other things, we now seek comment on whether IP CTS providers should require or enable their employees to flag instances where the captioning capability is turned on—and thus the call is being paid for out of the Fund—but the callers are not relying on the captions to communicate. These and other potential reforms we tee up can help ensure that support remains available and continues to flow to individuals with hearing loss.

It's important we act now, given the trends we're seeing in the program. Support for IP CTS is projected to cost nearly \$1 billion in 2018 alone, which is up from \$400 million in 2016. And while the costs of providing IP CTS have declined drastically over the past several years, the rates charged by providers have grown by a significant margin. This trend is unsustainable. So I welcome today's decision to bring compensation levels for IP CTS providers down to a closer approximation of their costs. I agree with our decision to more clearly greenlight the use of Automatic Speech Recognition, or ASR, technologies, which can be a more cost-effective and reliable way of generating captions. And I support Commissioner O'Rielly's request to seek comment on other alternative technologies that might assist individuals with hearing loss without cost to the Fund.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my colleagues' willingness to add a new section to the Further Notice that seeks comment on additional steps we might take to ensure call quality when IP CTS is used to dial 911. Given the often exigent circumstances present during such calls, I am glad that we are now developing a record on whether there is more we should do to ensure reliable 911 access.

Thank you to the staff of the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau for your work on this item. It has my support.