

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

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, Report and Order, Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, and Order

We rely on our phones for nearly every aspect of our lives. Whether it's connecting with a loved one, asking the city about the next trash pickup or just ordering pizza – every American relies on his or her phone to stay connected. Even as the digital revolution continues to transform our society, we still value the simple act of making or receiving a telephone call.

Congress has charged the FCC with ensuring that hearing and speech-impaired Americans can perform this essential task through the Telecommunications Relay Service. The variation of TRS we've discussed today, IP CTS, has become so popular that it now represents almost 80% of TRS minutes, at a cost of \$892 million per year. One reason for IP CTS's popularity is that it doesn't require any special equipment – you only need an ordinary phone and a computer or other web-enabled device to make and receive calls with captioning features like enlarged or colored text, different fonts, and so on. IP CTS and the other TRS programs allow millions of Americans, including hearing-impaired seniors and disabled veterans, to stay in touch with their families and communities.

Because the TRS programs provide such an important service, every dollar spent needs to help those who need the program most. As a long-time enforcement official, I deeply appreciate the Commission's responsibility as a steward of these funds and the need to make sure that they are used only as intended. Where we lack adequate safeguards, we must change our policies. And where parties have engaged in waste, fraud, or abuse, we should prosecute them to the full extent of the law. Notably, today's item applies a registration requirement to IP CTS users that will foreclose opportunities for abuse, protect the TRS fund's solvency and identify bad actors.

I am particularly pleased that this item will generate data that will allow us to more effectively manage the TRS program. Through the registration requirement, the Commission will not only know the total number of IP CTS users, but also the providers, devices and numbers associated with each user, as well as how rapidly or slowly users change providers. Given the size of all the federal funds administered by the Commission and the important public mission they serve, having such timely, granular and accurate data can only strengthen our ability to deliver these funds where they will do the most good.

Following publication of the draft version of this item, advocates for the hearing-disabled community requested that the Commission clarify that an IP CTS provider would receive compensation for service to an IP CTS user during the pendency of his or her verification appeal. I joined with Commissioner Rosenworcel in supporting this clarification, and I appreciate Chairman Pai's willingness to modify the item accordingly.

My thanks to the staff of the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau for your important work on this item.