

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL O'RIELLY**

Re: *Structure and Practices of the Video Relay Service Program*, CG Docket No. 10-51;
Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities, CG Docket No. 03-123

This item makes various improvements to the Commission's video relay service program (VRS) and contains good ideas. For example, I support the adoption of new rules to prohibit VRS providers from offering non-service related inducements to increase subscriptions. We must do everything we can to protect the investments of ratepayers and ensure that the telecommunications relay service (TRS) fund remains sustainable. That requires eliminating wasteful practices that artificially drive up minutes and drain the fund without commensurate benefits for subscribers.

While we're on the topic of sustainability, I also believe we need to think more broadly about how our TRS programs are addressing the *actual* needs of the deaf and hard of hearing community. As I explained to the Disability Advisory Committee last month, we need to face the reality that voice has become just another "app" and is declining in significance; directing scarce resources to ensure access to a relic of the past does not necessarily accomplish the objective of providing "functionally equivalent" service. While a shift away from voice service may not be suitable for all TRS program participants, we must consider how free and low-cost apps and technologies can better accommodate certain segments of the deaf and hard of hearing population. Given substantial fund growth in recent years, this is necessary to ensure the programs' sustained viability.

I look forward to examining the record in response to the item's Further Notice and vote to approve.