

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

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

Of all our responsibilities here at the Commission, Section 225 of the Act stands out. Congress has tasked this agency with ensuring the provision of services so that persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, or have speech disabilities can communicate in a manner that is functionally equivalent to persons without such disabilities. Our task is to make sure that all of the tools, conveniences, and opportunities that flow from effortless connectivity can be fully enjoyed by all of our friends and neighbors. Touching base with a doctor, getting help in an emergency, catching up with loved ones—and living independently, it is our job to make sure that important moments are not missed due to inaccessible systems and services.

Advances in technology help—video chat, translation and interpretation services, and other relatively new tools have brought us all closer to our goal of functional equivalence. But the Commission needs to keep its eye on the ball to make sure that we are doing our part to allow these technological advances to truly benefit everyone.

I support today's item. It advances direct video calling services, which better allow those with disabilities to have a natural, one-on-one conversation with somebody without requiring the assistance of a third party. It moves us a step closer to allowing communications assistants, the interpreters that fuel VRS services, to provide service from home without having to live close to a call center. Our pilot program on this point demonstrated that this is a win-win scenario—providing good jobs for more interpreters and allowing service providers to attract and retain high quality professionals.

The item also addresses public and enterprise videophones, so that these devices are more fully integrated into the program. I am pleased with edits made to the public draft to lessen burdens on entities that would maintain these videophones. We shouldn't risk having these devices removed from campuses, hospitals, and businesses simply because our requirements are too intrusive or burdensome.

All in all, this item advances our responsibilities under Section 225 and improves our VRS services for users. I support it and thank the Disability Rights Office and their colleagues in the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau for their work on this item.