

# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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June 3, 2020

The Honorable Ajit V. Pai  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street S.W.  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

As Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, as well as senior Members of the Senate Commerce Committee and Senate Appropriations Committee, we are writing in regards the Internet Protocol Captioned Telephone Service (IP CTS) program. First, we would like to commend you for the prompt and important actions you have taken to ensure that telecommunications relay services (TRS) are available during this time of national emergency. As you know, hundreds of thousands of our veterans, seniors and people with disabilities in our states and across America rely on these vital services.

While we appreciate your recent actions with respect to IP CTS, we also want to be sure that the program is given proper attention and support on a long-term basis. Our current national emergency underscores the importance of programs like TRS and IP CTS during a prolonged period of self-isolation and physical distancing, especially with at-risk populations. Fortunately, as you know, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) ensures that people with disabilities have access to functionally equivalent facilities, products and services and are able to communicate in the same manner as those without any hearing impairment.

Consistent with the requirements of the ADA and the Communications Act, we want to ensure both access and quality of service are at the forefront of the Commission's priorities. Unfortunately, the FCC has adopted only mandatory minimum standards for these services; we believe these minimum standards for communication services to hard of hearing veterans and seniors are inadequate. Again, we believe that these services should be held to the higher ADA standard of functional equivalency.

Specifically, we are concerned that the 2018 determination of Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) as functionally equivalent to the currently used speech-to-text method, human transcription or a combination of ASR and human transcription, was based upon an abbreviated study by the MITRE Corporation that did not test an adequate variety of voices or types of calls to reach this conclusion. We also are concerned that the FCC has not explained how ASR-only services meet the agency's specific mandatory minimum standards for IP CTS,

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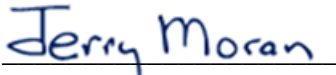
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nor has the FCC adopted service quality standards that address the unique aspects of ASR-only services. Without such standards and thorough peer-reviewed testing, neither the FCC nor consumers will be able to assess effectively whether ASR-only services will be suitable for providing these necessary services to those who need it most. Americans with hearing disabilities, especially veterans and seniors must not be disadvantaged as the FCC experiments with new technology in this critical service area.

We therefore urge the FCC to adopt service quality standards for ASR-only services to ensure a smooth transition and that the technology is ready to provide service in the same manner as IP CTS. We look forward to working with you on this important issue and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Jerry Moran  
Chairman



Jon Tester  
Ranking Member