

**REMARKS OF
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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES TECH FORUM
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Hello, AAPD! It's great to be with you this afternoon and I look forward to your questions. But before we get going with our discussion, I wanted to offer a brief overview of some of the things we're working on at the Federal Communications Commission.

First, for those who don't know me, I want you to know I have been working with this community on accessibility and technology issues for nearly two decades. Setting aside my time at the FCC, I also served as counsel to the United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. In that role I had the opportunity to help craft the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act and help it become law. I still keep a signed copy of this legislation in my office.

Since taking the reins at the FCC, I've done my best to meet that long-standing commitment with action. We have done a lot in a relatively short time.

When it comes to harnessing the power of technology to improve the lives of persons with disabilities, it all starts with making sure *everyone* is connected. You can't take advantage of new broadband-enabled technologies if you don't have broadband. On this front, we've made historic progress.

As part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill the President signed last November, Congress directed the FCC to create the Affordable Connectivity Program. This is our nation's largest ever broadband affordability effort.

It's a big deal. Because thanks to this new program, eligible households can get discounts of up to \$30 a month for broadband service. You can also receive up to \$100 to offset the cost of a computer or tablet.

The FCC has had the program up-and-running as on New Year's Day. More than 11 million households have enrolled. With the help of outreach from AAPD and this audience, we can make sure that number continues to grow so that more people in more places can afford the connectivity they need. So let's keep working together and getting the word out.

We've also been plenty busy with efforts specifically targeted to address accessibility issues.

One of the issues we're focused on is real-time text, which allows for more conversational text messaging without having to press the send button. This February, our Disability Advisory Committee issued recommendations on ways to bring this functionality to wireline networks.

At the same meeting, the Committee issued a report identifying ways to expand the use Telecommunications Relay Service with video conferencing platforms that during the pandemic became such an important way to connect. Then, just last week the FCC sought further comment on what “interoperable video conferencing services” means under the law.

We’re moving forward with rules to enable text messaging to 988, the new national three-digit number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. This will make it easier for those who have disabilities that affect communication to contact a crisis counselor.

We’ve also launched a series of forums we’ve titled, “The State of Video Programming Accessibility.” The idea is to host in-depth conversations of certain topics, identify where our rules might need to be updated, and where further legislation may be required.

Our first forum last December focused on online closed captioning, including discussions of technical and business issues and an examination of FCC authority under current law.

The second forum this March examined the availability of audio description online, including how the FCC could facilitate it, industry best practices, and technological opportunities and obstacles.

These discussions have been well received and have been helpful for both participants and our staff. An added benefit is that they have helped to shine a light on issues that might otherwise be overlooked—but have grown more important during the hyperconnected, pandemic days. We anticipate that there will be additional forums in this series so be on the lookout for specific announcements.

By no means is this an exhaustive list of everything we’ve been doing. But I think gives you a pretty good sense of our approach to accessibility issues. Basically, we are casting a wide net and engaging with groups like you and others to identify challenges, and then we are leveraging these collaborations to identify solutions.

Thank you to AAPD for being such a valuable partner in these efforts. I look forward to working with you to build on this progress and create a more accessible future for all.