

STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS

Re: *Access to Video Conferencing*, CG Docket No. 23-161; *Implementation of Sections 716 and 717 of the Communications Act of 1934, as Enacted by the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010*, CG Docket No. 10-213; *Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities*, CG Docket No. 03-123; *Petition of Sorenson Communications, LLC for a Limited Waiver of the Privacy Screen Rule*, Report and Order, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, and Order (June 8, 2023)

I frequently speak about the necessity of a high-speed broadband connection in today's world. One of the reasons this is so critical is the rise in video conferencing. From Zoom parent-teacher conferences, to WebEx telehealth calls, to Teams work meetings, web-based video conferencing is now one of the primary ways we communicate, in both our personal and professional lives.

So we must make sure that video conferencing is accessible to everyone. The FCC is charged with ensuring that individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, or who have speech disabilities can communicate in a manner that is functionally equivalent to those without such disabilities. Too often, as we've heard from our Disability Advisory Committee, that isn't the case with video conferencing. Today, we take an important step to change this. We find that all services that meet Congress' definition of "interoperable video conferencing service" must be accessible to and usable by people with disabilities.

With this important finding made, we propose performance objectives these services must meet: captioning, text-to-speech, and sign language interpreting, including integration with video relay service, or VRS. I am glad to see that this item also takes on the critical issue of making sure that speech recognition systems are game-ready to transcribe the speech of all types of speakers, including those with accents.

I look forward to seeing how this record develops, and to continuing to hear from the disability community on these issues as this process moves forward. My thanks to the Commission staff who worked on this item; it has my full support.