

**SEPARATE STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN MICHAEL K. POWELL**

Re: In the Matter of Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities; Second Report and Order, Order on Reconsideration, and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking; CC Docket No. 98-67 & CG Docket No. 03-123

As developments in telecommunications technologies continue to improve the lives of Americans, the Commission must ensure that those Americans with disabilities are empowered to participate fully in this digital migration and reap its benefits equally with their neighbors. In executing this mission, we are to ensure that our regulations encourage the use of existing technology and do not discourage the development of improved technology. By expanding the scope and variations of covered services and features for TRS, the Commission responds to this obligation to keep pace with technological change.

This item acknowledges technological advancement by expanding the mechanisms by which TRS users may communicate even further by requiring TRS providers to offer six new variations of TRS calls including two-line voice carry over and two-line hearing carry over. It also opens the door to services such as call release, speed dialing and three-way calling to TRS users. We also take steps to ensure that critical safety-of-life applications – such as E911 – are functional and accessible over the TRS platform.

My colleagues and I remain committed to continue this work. Our efforts are in no way complete. On the contrary, developments central to our national security bring new considerations in our efforts to ensure functionally equivalent communications for hearing-impaired and speech-impaired individuals. Significantly, we initiate the important step to integrate TRS into our homeland security efforts by tentatively concluding that these facilities should receive the same National Security/Emergency Preparedness (NS/EP) priority under the Telecommunications Service Priority (TSP) System as local exchange carriers. This initiative will ensure that, in the event of a disaster or emergency, restoring TRS service – and, thus, the ability to communicate of individuals with speech and hearing disabilities – will receive the same priority as restoring other essential communications platforms. Additionally, we seek comment on the routing of emergency wireless calls made to a TRS center to the appropriate Public Safety Answering Point. Finally, although we have recently witnessed a nationwide marketing campaign by a TRS provider about TRS, we seek comment on ways to further achieve the important goal of educating the general public about TRS.

I would like to thank my colleagues for their contribution in the development of this item. I would also like to acknowledge the hard work of the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, specifically the Disability Rights Office, in bringing this item, that is so important in the lives of so many Americans, to the Commission.