

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER KATHLEEN Q. ABERNATHY**

*Re: Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities (CC Docket No. 98-67 and CG Docket No. 03-123),
FCC 05-141*

*Re: Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities (CG Docket No. 03-123 and CC Docket No. 98-67),
FCC 05-140*

*Re: Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities (CC Docket No. 98-67 and CG Docket No. 03-123),
FCC 05-139*

Re: Closed Captioning of Video Programming and Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc. Petition for Rulemaking (CG Docket No. 05-231), FCC 05-142

Lou Ann Walker, a noted advocate for the hearing-impaired, once said that the inability to *hear* is a nuisance, but the inability to *communicate* is a tragedy. These four items will allow consumers with hearing or speech impediments to communicate better by enabling them to receive improved service from their telephones and televisions.

Many of the decisions this Commission is called upon to make involve arcane matters with sometimes ambiguous results. That is not the case here. The issues in these items could not be clearer, and the effects of our rulings could not be more concrete. Today's decisions promise to have a profound and positive impact on the lives of millions of Americans living with hearing and speech disabilities. In short, I am hopeful that by expanding access to TRS and VRS offerings, and by opening a new proceeding to consider our closed captioning rules for video programming, we are helping to turn tragedies into nuisances.

Of course, whenever we enhance offerings such as TRS, VRS, and closed captioning, we must bear in mind the costs imposed by those offerings, which are borne by all consumers. I am pleased that the TRS and VRS items will dramatically expand access to these services *without* significantly increasing the costs involved. I am also satisfied that the *Notice of Proposed Rulemaking* on closed captioning seeks comment on issues relating to cost and practicality, and will produce a full record on those matters for the Commission's consideration.

Finally, I am particularly pleased that we have been able to resolve the cost-containment questions raised by compensating Spanish-language VRS from the Interstate TRS Fund. The record shows that Spanish is, by far, the most widely used non-English language spoken in the United States. It also demonstrates that the costs of providing ASL-to-Spanish VRS service are not significantly greater than the costs associated with ASL-to-English VRS service, a factor that was not clearly evident from the prior record. In my judgment these factors warranted reevaluation, and ultimately reversal, of our earlier decision denying compensation for such services.

One of our most important responsibilities is to make sure that there are no telecom “have-nots,” and that the wealth of services provided by today’s new technologies are available to *all* consumers. These four items, taken together, help to do just that.