

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER JONATHAN S. ADELSTEIN**

Re: Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities, CG Docket No. 03-123, Declaratory Ruling and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (May 3, 2006).

I'm pleased to support this Order which will significantly enhance the access to and the quality of communications services for the deaf and hard of hearing community. It ensures that Video Relay Service (VRS) providers do not block or degrade consumers' access to the VRS provider of their choosing. This Order will improve the ability of Americans with disabilities to communicate using VRS technology, increase access to emergency services, and better achieve the "functional equivalency" standard of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

VRS is an increasingly important tool for those portions of the deaf and hard of hearing community who rely on American Sign Language (ASL). VRS allows ASL and hearing individuals to have real-time conversations that more closely mirror the speed and natural flow of voice-to-voice conversations. For anyone who has had the chance to use VRS services or see them demonstrated, it is not surprising that VRS has been widely embraced by the deaf and hard of hearing community, particularly given that VRS more vividly conveys emotions than traditional relay services. It also opens a world of new communications opportunities for many senior citizens, children, and others who may be unable to type on a TTY phone easily. Users of VRS rely on these services not only to communicate with friends and family, but also to run successful businesses, reach operators in the event of an emergency, and complete everyday tasks that many of us take for granted.

Given the increasing adoption of VRS, I'm pleased that we are able to respond to concerns about VRS blocking practices. This Order finds that restricting access to competing VRS providers is inconsistent with the ADA, Section 225 of the Communications Act, and the public interest. The approach we take here was supported by the leading national organizations for people who are deaf and hard of hearing, hundreds of individual consumers, and the FCC's own Consumer Advisory Committee. So, I'm glad that we take another step toward ensuring that every person who is deaf or hard of hearing will have access to a dial tone and the critical link to the rest of the world that our telephone system provides.

We also move forward with a Further Notice that seeks comment on how we can make it easier for hearing persons to contact VRS users through any VRS provider. VRS has a reciprocal role as a valuable tool for those many hearing Americans who wish to reach members of the deaf and hard of hearing community, so this is an important inquiry and I look forward to the record that we will develop here.

Finally, I want to commend Chairman Martin and my colleagues for their commitment on these issues, and would like to thank Monica Desai and the staff of our Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau for their hard work on this item. I look forward to working with my colleagues and with the hearing and speech impaired communities as we continue to work

towards the ADA's enduring standard of accessibility and functional equivalency for all Americans.