

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Re: Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities; E911 Requirements for IP-Enabled Service Providers, CG Docket No. 03-123 and WC Docket No. 05-196, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking.

Today the Commission takes another essential step towards making sure that come December 31, 2008 the deaf and hard of hearing community will be able to obtain 10-digit phone numbers – something that most of us with a cell phone or home phone too often take for granted. In doing so, users of Internet-based Telecommunications Relay Services such as Video Relay Service and IP-Relay will be able to give their friends, family, doctors, and employers a phone number to reach them just like voice telephone users. The Order requires that these phone numbers be portable and the consumer devices be interoperable. The Order also requires that emergency calls placed by these users be automatically and correctly connected with local emergency services. I am pleased to support this Order and the Commission’s decision to require that all of this be completed no later than December 31, 2008. Deaf and hard of hearing consumers have waited too long for this service already and it is certainly consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act’s mandate of “functional equivalency.”

Getting to this juncture has not been an easy road and there is still much work to do. For this reason, I also support the Commission’s Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking seeking comment on certain implementation issues involving emergency calling, Customer Proprietary Network Information, and anti-slammings rules. Comment is also sought on other important issues such as the appropriate timeline for existing users to sign-up for a number, the assignment of multiple phone numbers to a user or a single phone number to multiple services, how costs for this new system should be covered, and ways to prevent fraud. These and other issues teed up in the Further Notice are all critical questions, many of them novel, and I would urge all stakeholders to provide the Commission with the benefit of their insights, knowledge and experience.

The Order also emphasizes the critical need for consumer outreach. The availability of phone numbers is a very big step in the advancement of functionally equivalent telephone service for the deaf and hard hearing community. With that will come many questions, probably some concerns, and inevitably I fear some confusion as we move to the system adopted today. For these reasons, it’s incumbent upon the FCC, providers, and consumer advocacy organizations to engage in a coordinated campaign to inform the disability community.

As with most systemic and promising changes, it is essential that all stakeholders, particularly the disability community, provide the Commission with its ongoing input and ideas. The FCC must do a good job of monitoring the process and be ready to respond to any unintended consequences. In addition, the Commission must remain diligent in its efforts to oversee the integrity of these programs. The move to a numbering system should afford the Commission, providers, and businesses additional tools in their efforts to combat fraud, particularly when it comes to IP-Relay.

I want to thank Chairman Martin and all my colleagues for their support for this Order and their efforts in making it come to fruition. I also appreciate the hard work and guidance provided by the deaf and hard of hearing community on these important issues. Finally, I want to pay tribute to Cathy Seidel and Nicole McGinnis of the Consumer and Government Affairs Bureau,

Tom Chandler of the Disabilities Rights Office, Dana Shaffer and Nick Alexander of the Wireline Competition Bureau, and their teams who in less than three months organized a stakeholder workshop, analyzed a refreshed record, and labored long hours on this technical, complicated and important Order. While we're not home yet, their ongoing efforts are worthy of recognition.