

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Re: *Amendment of the Commission's Rules Governing Hearing Aid-Compatible Mobile Handsets, WT Docket No. 07-250.*

Today we reaffirm our commitment that every American has a right to full inclusion in this age of technology revolution. Throughout my time at the Commission, I have had countless inspiring opportunities to work with the disabilities communities. These experiences have reinforced in me the critical role this agency must play in ensuring that these Americans are not left behind as technology advances—that their accessibility needs are being met when communicating over the telephone (as we address here), watching television or accessing and using broadband. We have made progress, to be sure—good progress. But there is more to do and, as opportunity-creating new technologies keep coming at us, we need to be always ready to make sure these new products and services—so full of promise for our disabilities communities—are available to them.

So I welcome the clear going-forward statement of policy we make today that persons with hearing aids and cochlear implants must have access to the most advanced and innovative technologies that science and markets allow. And I am pleased that we tighten our existing hearing aid compatibility rules by modifying the *de minimis* exception that applied to companies offering two or fewer handsets over a given air interface to now require all large companies to offer at least one hearing aid-compatible model after an initial two-year period. Strong and clear rules are critical to accomplishing our statutory obligation of ensuring that our nation's telecommunications networks are accessible to Americans with hearing loss.

Our decision will ensure that the hearing loss community has far greater access to the newest and most popular smartphones. And, I am particularly pleased that the outcome we reach today was shaped in no small measure by the input and contributions of the Hearing Loss Association of America and others from the hearing loss community. If I have learned one thing from my years of fighting for greater inclusion for persons with disabilities, it is that accessibility must be addressed at the earliest stages of both product design and agency rule-making. It is far more efficient and cost-effective to have these communities present at the creation of new products and services and new government regulations than it is to retrofit after it's discovered that something wasn't properly designed or considered.

I want to express my gratitude to Ruth Milkman and her team in the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau for their hard work on this item. I would also like to express my deep thanks to the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, especially Joel Gurin and Karen Peltz Strauss, for their ongoing work on accessibility. In the wake of last month's celebrations in honor of the twentieth anniversary of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act, I hope that we are all re-energized to tackle the outstanding issues in this proceeding as well as the wide range of accessibility issues facing this Commission.