

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MIGNON L. CLYBURN**

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

When Congress enacted the Hearing Aid Compatibility Act of 1988, it found that “to the fullest extent made possible by technology and medical science, hearing-impaired persons should have equal access to the national telecommunications network.” Today’s item will help achieve that goal by adopting policies that are intended to ensure that the more than seven million Americans who currently use hearing aids, have continuing access to the most advanced communications technologies as they develop. Therefore, I am pleased that the Commission was able to reach unanimous consent on the policy decisions in this item.

The Policy Statement we adopt today makes two points that have been missing from the Commission’s principles on hearing aid compatibility. The first point is that the goal of this Commission is “[t]o maximize the number of accessible products for [the hearing-impaired] population.” The second point is that, to achieve this goal, the Commission’s policies must adhere to the principle of “encourag[ing] manufacturers of new technologies, to consider hearing aid compatibility at the earliest stages of the product design process.” I have long been a proponent of the idea that those living with disabilities should not be an afterthought in our policymaking process. Similarly, industry should be encouraged to consider how it can design networks and devices to allow those with disabilities equivalent access to communications services. Thus, I am pleased that my colleagues agree on this score with respect to hearing aid compatibility.

The changes that the Report and Order adopt should significantly increase the number of advanced handsets that are accessible to those that use hearing aids. Modifying the *de minimis* exception so all large entities will be required to offer at least one hearing aid-compatible model within two years after entry, will ensure, that more handsets are covered by our hearing aid compatibility rules. It should also lead to the most advanced handsets, such as the popular iPhone, being accessible earlier to those with hearing loss. I applaud the recent efforts of handset manufacturers and consumer advocates to find consensus on such an important issue in order to expedite our decision.

I also support the rule changes proposed in the Further Notice. As new technologies take hold, it is important that our hearing aid compatibility rules apply so that all consumers, including the hearing-impaired, benefit. I hope the Commission will expeditiously consider the record on the tentative conclusion that our hearing aid compatibility rules should extend beyond just CMRS services, to include customer equipment used for wireless voice communications over any type of network by a substantial portion of the public. This would allow the hearing aid compatibility rules to apply to telephone services such as Voice over Internet Protocol Services, when provided through a handset that is designed to make phone calls. I look forward to seeing the innovations that unfold in the design of hearing aid compatible equipment. But I am most excited to see the opportunities that will flourish as more members of the hearing impaired community, gain access to more advanced handsets.

I thank the staffs of the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, and the Office of the General Counsel, for their hard work on this item.