

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER AJIT PAI**

Re: *Implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, Section 105, Relay Services for Deaf-Blind Individuals*, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, CG Docket No. 10-210.

Helen Keller said, “blindness separates people from things; deafness separates people from people.” It follows that the combination of these two conditions can have a devastating effect on one’s capacity to interact and engage with the world.

But technology can help make a difference. Over the last few decades, we have witnessed incredible advances in accessible technologies for deaf-blind individuals. Whether it’s an automated Braille keyboard and display or an amplified speakerphone, whether it’s a screen reader or a vibrating signaler, these technologies give deaf-blind individuals the opportunity to communicate and improve their quality of life beyond measure.

But this new technology doesn’t come cheap. The cost of buying specialized equipment, installing it, and learning how to use it can exceed \$5,000 per person.¹ So Congress directed the FCC to allocate up to \$10 million each year to support programs that distribute specialized equipment to low-income individuals who are deaf-blind.²

After three years, it’s clear that our pilot, the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program, has been a resounding success. For example, Willie Bivins, a 64-year-old poet and freelance writer from Georgia, reports that the equipment “saved [his] life tremendously.” He says it has encouraged him to write about “how hard it is sometimes to be deaf and blind, to communicate and to live.” He also “want[s] people to know that the equipment made a difference”—as he puts it, “Finally, the miracle happened. Finally, the dream came true.”³ And he’s just one of 1,893 individuals who have realized this dream so far.

It’s now time to transition to a permanent program, and I want to emphasize the importance of a smooth and timely transition—with no lapse in the equipment distribution process. I commend the staff of the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau for their diligent work running the pilot, and I want to extend my gratitude to Bob Aldrich, Darryl Cooper, Rosaline Crawford, Jackie Ellington, Elaine Gardner, Karen Peltz Strauss, and Caitlin Vogus for fostering this program. Your efforts have improved the lives of so many deaf-blind individuals already. I look forward to working with you and my colleagues to improve the lives of thousands more.

¹ *Notice of Proposed Rulemaking*, Appendix C (“Expenditures per person for assessments, equipment, installation, and training = \$5,252.”).

² Communications Act § 719.

³ Georgia Poet Communicates “Like Never Before” Thanks to iCanConnect, <http://bit.ly/1eggr6E> (Sept. 15, 2014).