STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN BRENDAN CARR

Re: *Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities; T-Mobile Accessibility Petition for Rulemaking to Amend 47 CFR § 64.604(b)(1) to Eliminate the Requirement that TTY-Based Relay Service be Capable of Communicating with ASCII Format*, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, CG Docket No. 03-123, RM-11931 (June 26, 2025).

Next month, on July 26, we will mark the 35th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. As the first comprehensive law ever passed for people with disabilities, the ADA has been a historic legislative act. And the FCC has played a key role in advancing the success of the ADA. In particular, the FCC implements and enforces the portion of the ADA that requires providers to offer Telecommunications Relay Services. TRS offerings allow people who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, or speech impaired to communicate by telephone in a manner that is functionally equivalent to persons without disabilities. These services vary in technology, but they all employ a communications assistant or other intermediary, including ASR technologies, to facilitate telephone calls for hundreds of thousands of Americans every year.

Since the 1960s, when teletypewriters or TTYs were introduced to the deaf community, relay services have evolved significantly. But the FCC's original rules governing TTY services, which were adopted in 1991, haven't fully kept up. Those rules require that TTY-based devices must be capable of communicating in two coding formats: Baudot and ASCII. When those rules were adopted, ASCII was broadly considered "a superior technology" for TTY transmission. In fact, it was estimated that ASCII would transmit words at twice the speed per minute. The market delivered a different verdict. It turned out that ASCII was more Betamax than VHS.

Today, ASCII calls account for approximately 0.01% of TTY-based communications. And the two nationwide providers of TTY-based relay services both report that the number of monthly users placing ASCII calls is in the single digits. They also report that the FCC's rules impose real costs on TRS providers to maintain costly ASCII-compatible hardware and software systems.

Today, in response to a petition seeking relief from the ASCII requirement, which received widespread support including from a coalition of accessibility advocacy organizations, the Commission proposes removing the ASCII requirement from our TTY rules. If adopted, TRS providers will not have to maintain costly ASCII-compatible hardware and software systems and can invest in their provision of service instead.

Thank you to the staff who worked on this item, including Robert Aldrich, Ed Bartholme, Ike Ofobike, and Michael Scott.