

**Separate Statement of Commissioner Michael J. Copps****Re: *Section 68.4 of the Commission's Rules Governing Hearing Aid-Compatible Telephones, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (rel. November 14, 2001).***

I support the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking.

It is our challenge and responsibility to harness the power of technology for the benefit of all Americans. Congress has told us that we must make communications technologies accessible by people with disabilities. The digital tools of the Information Age are the keys to unlocking the doors of opportunity. We must make sure that those doors are open -- and remain open -- for all Americans, and not locked shut for some, as, unfortunately, they are today in many cases. My goal as an FCC Commissioner is to help bring the best, most accessible, and cost-effective telecommunications system in the world to our people -- and I mean all of our people. Each and every American should have access to the wonders of telecommunications.

As we begin this proceeding on hearing aid compatible wireless telephones I want to highlight the strides that the Commission made before I arrived:

- The Commission wrote new rules to ensure that communications products and services are accessible to those with disabilities, as Congress directed, in Section 255.
- The Commission overhauled and updated our Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS) rules to provide for faster, more effective relay services.
- The Commission also established 711 for relay services so that consumers will no longer need to remember different TRS numbers and TRS users will be able to put one number on their business cards, thereby making it easier for people to call them. The Commission recently put this into effect.
- The Commission took action on captioning to ensure that everyone has access to televised information, including, most importantly, warnings about emergency situations.

Now our new Commission has taken the first step to addressing compatibility problems between wireless phones and hearing aids. As we move forward with this NPRM, I want to recognize the commitment of the wireless industry to serving people with disabilities. Working closely with both manufacturers, service providers, and organizations that represent people with hearing loss will be critical as we move toward an Order. Business plays a critical role by innovating and investing in ways that can make products accessible. History has shown that incorporating accessibility at the design stage makes good business sense. Industry benefits greatly by making products and services accessible to the broadest range of users.

Businesses have committed themselves to this task. A few months ago, over forty chief executives of high-tech and telecommunications companies pledged to develop and market products and services that are accessible to those with disabilities. I commend these companies and urge others to join their efforts to remove barriers to opportunity. We should all work together on this important matter.

The Commission has taken a positive step today, but it is only a beginning. We have so far to go. We must continue to do what we can to ensure that Americans with disabilities are not left behind, as has happened too often in the past. I commend the Wireless Bureau staff for their hard work on this item and hope that we can issue an Order quickly.