

Date sent:

Wednesday, March 09, 2011

Subject:

FCC Proposes Rules Requiring the Accessibility of Advanced Communications and Video Programming for Millions of Consumers with Disabilities

On March 3, 2011, the Federal Communications Commission issued three Notices of Proposed Rulemaking to make communications and video programming accessible by people with disabilities: (1) Advanced Communications; (2) Video Description and (3) contributions to the telecommunications relay service (TRS) Fund. Each of the proposed rules are part of the FCC's implementation of the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, a law designed to ensure that 54 million individuals with disabilities in the United States have full access to new and emerging communication services, equipment and networks.

The first NPRM approved by the Commission asks questions about how best to ensure that Americans with disabilities have access to advanced communications equipment and services, including electronic messaging (e-mail, instant messaging, etc.), video communications, and voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) communications services. It also, seeks comments on how to make ensure that Internet browsers built into mobile telephones are accessible by people who are blind or visually impaired. Finally, it asks about new recordkeeping obligations for companies covered by these new obligations, as well as ways to make it easier for consumers to file complaints when they do not get the access that they need. www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro/headlines.html

The second NPRM reinstates the FCC's video description rules, which had been overturned by a federal court in 2002. Video description is the insertion of audio narrated descriptions of a television program's key visual elements into natural pauses in the program's dialogue. Video description is designed to make video programming more accessible to individuals who are blind or visually impaired. www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro/headlines.html

The third NPRM requires VoIP providers to contribute to the TRS Fund. TRS enables people who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech disabled to communicate with other individuals in voice, text, and video through communications assistants using telephone and Internet connections. www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro/headlines.html

The following are links to statements on the new proposals released by FCC Chairman Genachowski and FCC Commissioner Copps:

Statement by FCC Chairman Genachowski www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro/headlines.html

Statement by Commissioner Copps www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro/headlines.html