



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

June 24, 2005

Dear Colleagues and Friends:

Fifteen years ago, the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) heralded groundbreaking changes that have permitted a large and talented segment of our population to participate in all aspects of life in America.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is responsible for shepherding the ADA's Title IV, which ensures that Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS) provide facilitated telephone transmission services for persons with hearing and speech disabilities. With the advancement of technologies, TRS is now available through Internet-based relay, both Internet Protocol relay and Video Relay Services (VRS).

The roll out of a unified nationwide system of TRS by 1993 had a direct and significant impact on deaf and hard of hearing individuals across the country, who were, for the first time, able to use telecommunications services to seek, and obtain, employment; call relatives and friends; and make other types of calls most hearing people may take for granted. Since 1993, hundreds of millions of minutes of conversations have taken place over TRS. The subsequent growth of VRS since 2000, when the FCC first recognized VRS as a form of TRS, has been nothing short of astounding: in April 2005, monthly minutes were approximately 1.8 million, a ten-fold increase in the past two years, and more than the number of interstate traditional TRS minutes.

Closed captioning, while not originating from the ADA, has been motivated by many of the same concerns. To ensure that video programming is accessible to deaf and hard of hearing individuals, the 1996 Telecommunications Act provided for the phase-in of closed captioning of new and pre-existing programming by video programming distributors.

In addition, access to emergency information that is aired on television is of critical importance to persons with hearing and visual disabilities. FCC rules require that emergency information that is provided aurally must be made accessible to persons with hearing disabilities and that emergency information provided visually must be made accessible to persons with visual disabilities. Enforcement of these requirements by the FCC ensures that Americans with hearing and visual disabilities have access to emergency information.

The FCC and I are happy to join in the celebration of the ADA, and to celebrate what a difference 15 years and the ADA have made.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin J. Martin".

Kevin J. Martin
Chairman