

**SEPARATE STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER JONATHAN S. ADELSTEIN**

Re: In the Matter of Amendment of Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities; CC Docket No. 98-67, CG Docket No. 03-123

I am an ardent supporter of universal service. I wholeheartedly believe that disability rights issues go hand-in-hand with universal service in that the Commission must strive for universal, or functionally equivalent, access to all telecommunications products and services. For persons with hearing and speech impairments, the initiatives we adopt today ensure that they are able to take full advantage of our country's ever-evolving telecommunications and information networks by being able to communicate through the latest technologies.

Public interest issues, especially disability rights, always should remain in the forefront of our decisions as Congress intended. While a staff member in the U.S. Senate, I worked on the Americans with Disabilities Act and devoted a great amount of attention to the Social Security Disability Insurance program. These concerns remain central to me on the Commission, as well.

Today's action is centered upon the adoption of the TRS Order, which is designed to give persons with hearing or speech impairments "functionally equivalent" access to our nation's telecommunications network. By adopting this Order, the Commission takes yet another significant step toward fulfilling the mandates of Title IV of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). I fully support our decision today to require additional TRS features and services to facilitate and expand the use of TRS by persons with hearing and speech impairments.

I also welcome our request for comment on other matters related to TRS, and urge all stakeholders to comment on our tentative proposal to allow TRS facilities to receive an NS/EP priority status. This is particularly important since TRS can be the only means of communications between persons with hearing and speech impairments and emergency services personnel.

Our Further Notice also asks for input on the important goal of improving our outreach efforts for the TRS program to all Americans, an initiative that I strongly support. In the FNPRM, we ask if we can require outreach and, if so, how best can we achieve results, and how best can we control costs by targeting the use of the funds.

I would like to thank the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau and the Disabilities Rights Office on a job well done. This is an important issue to bring to our attention, and I hope that additional comprehensive steps will be taken to ensure functionally equal access to the network that drives our way of life.