

Excerpts from Text-to-911 Order (FCC 14-118)

¶ 15: The Commission’s Emergency Access Advisory Committee (EAAC) noted that individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech-disabled and need to communicate with 911 via voice currently have no direct means of accessing 911 while mobile other than through attaching a separate teletype (TTY) device to their cellphone.¹ However, the vast majority of people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech-disabled has discarded TTYs or has never acquired or used a “mobile” TTY, and thus no longer has a practicable means of directly accessing 911.² Nevertheless, the EAAC found that many individuals who are deaf have service plans that include SMS.³ One key finding of the EAAC is that “individuals with disabilities should be able to call 9-1-1 using the same means they use for everyday telecommunication.”

¶ 16: Today, in the absence of text-to-911, individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech disabled and who do not use TTYs have no other feasible option but to rely on telecommunications relay services (TRS) to access 911 emergency services,⁴ unless they are with another individual who can make a voice call on their behalf.

¹ Emergency Access Advisory Committee, Report and Recommendations (Dec. 7, 2011) at 29 (EAAC Report). The EAAC was required to make its recommendations to the Commission by December 7, 2011, which the Commission was then empowered to implement by regulation. *See infra* Section III.F (discussion the Commission’s legal authority). A TTY, also sometimes called a “TDD,” is a text device that employs graphic communication in the transmission of coded signals through a wire or radio communication system. *See* 47 CFR § 64.601(22); Telecommunications Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities and the Americans with Disabilities Act, *Report and Order and Request for Comments*, 6 FCC Rcd 4657 at 4657 ¶ 1, n.1 (1991).

² *But see* Emergency Access Advisory Committee, Report on TTY Transition (rel. Mar. 2013) at 14 (outlining reasons for retaining the TTY until there is an appropriate substitute. For instance, deaf-blind individuals may not have other communication solutions available at this time).

³ EAAC Report at 29.

⁴ *See* 47 U.S.C. § 225, codifying the requirement in Title IV of the ADA for the Commission to establish a nationwide TRS program. This program has been in place since 1993. *See generally* 47 C.F.R. § 64.601 *et seq.*