

**Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554**

In the Matter of)	
)	
Telecommunications Relay Services and)	
Speech-to-Speech Services for)	CC Docket No. 98-67
Individuals with Hearing and Speech)	
Disabilities)	
)	CG Docket No. 03-123
)	
Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990)	

REPLY COMMENTS OF:

Iowa Utilities Board
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Des Moines, IA 50319

The Iowa Utilities Board (Iowa) files these reply comments on August 1, 2003, in response to the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC or the Commission) in CG Docket No. 03-123. Iowa evaluated the issues presented in the NPRM against the backdrop of functional equivalence.¹ Iowa's comments are presented in the order found in the FCC's Second Report and Order, et al., released on June 17, 2003, and referenced by the paragraph numbers found in that report.

¹ Functional equivalence, as it is used here, means telecommunications services that provide the ability for an individual who has a hearing or speech disability to engage in telecommunication with a hearing individual in a manner that is functionally equivalent to the ability of an individual who does not have a hearing or speech disability to communicate using voice telecommunications. 47 U.S.C. § 225 (a)(3).

COMMENTS

¶105 National Security/Emergency Preparedness for TRS Facilities and Services

Iowa agrees with the tentative conclusion of the Commission that it is appropriate to assign at least the same National Security/Emergency Preparedness priority to Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) as is applied to local exchange carriers or other telecommunications services available to the general public. TRS is the only means of telephone communication for many deaf, hard-of-hearing, and speech-impaired persons. The rules should be amended to provide for continuity of TRS facility operations in the event of an emergency.

¶107 Security of Internet Protocol (IP) Relay Calls

The Commission seeks comment on whether IP Relay calls should be provided with the level of security that is commonly used in commercial transactions over the Internet by using encryption techniques. If a non-Relay user uses Internet communication such as instant messaging, there is no encryption. Therefore, Iowa questions whether functional equivalence requires encryption for IP Relay calls. It seems that IP Relay should be functionally equivalent to other means of Internet communications, not to commercial transactions. If a relay user chooses to make a call over the Internet, the user should be willing to accept the same risk as a non-relay user.

¶1114 Non-English Language TRS

The Commission seeks comment on whether TRS that employs a non-shared language translation service is consistent with, or necessary under, the Commission's functional equivalence mandate. The service referred to here is a translation service between parties that speak different languages and is not functionally equivalent. If a person who does not use the relay service needs a call to be translated, that person must pay for that service.

¶1119 – 124 TRS Facilities

If the services described in these paragraphs² are technically feasible and they make TRS services more functionally equivalent, they should be required.

² The services discussed include: 1) using communication access real-time translation (CART) to increase the speed of a TRS call (CART is an instant translation of the spoken word into English using a stenotype machine, notebook computer, and real-time software); 2) offering interrupt functionality through TRS, which allows a TTY user to interrupt incoming text messages in order to convey a message back to the Communications Assistant, so that the TRS conversation is more like a conventional telephone conversation in which each party can begin speaking before the other party has finished speaking; 3) availability of anonymous call rejection, call screening, and preferred call-forwarding to TRS customers; and 4) TRS offering of talking call return, sometimes called "automatic call-back", which allows a caller to automatically return the last incoming telephone call whether or not the call was answered.

¶128 – 133 Public Access to Information and Outreach

Paragraph 78 in the Second Report & Order states that the Commission received conflicting views regarding TRS outreach, as two telephone companies disagreed with the proposal to fund national outreach through the Interstate TRS Fund. Iowa does not believe that anyone can say there is a general public awareness of TRS and that the current means of providing outreach has been adequate. The general public does not know that TRS even exists. If a typical telephone user were to ask their friends if they have heard of TRS, most will say no. If someone says yes, that person probably knows someone who is deaf. It is Iowa's understanding that hang-ups are still a significant problem for TRS users because many people who have not previously received a TRS call think it is a telemarketing call and hang up on the TRS user. After ten years, it is time to implement a more effective outreach method.

Iowa agrees with the comments made by Commissioner Copps regarding TRS outreach. A national outreach campaign should be initiated right away that sends the message "Don't Hang Up!" and educates the public how to use TRS so that TRS use is familiar and comfortable to the general public. It is appropriate to fund the campaign at the national level through the Interstate TRS Fund.

¶1135 Reimbursement of Video Relay Service (VRS) from the Interstate TRS

Fund

The question should be asked, "How important is VRS to the deaf community?"

The Iowa Utilities Board relies on the expertise of its Dual Party Relay Council (DPRC) for advice regarding TRS issues. Several members of the DPRC are deaf. Those members have told us they strongly prefer VRS because it allows them to communicate in their own language. VRS provides those customers with the closest functional equivalence that is technically possible at this time.

Therefore, Iowa urges continuation of the federal funding for the service. VRS is still very expensive and if the State of Iowa had to pay for the service at its current cost, Iowa may not be able to offer it.

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