



March 29, 2005

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
455 Twelfth Street, S.W.
Washington D.C. 20554

Re: WT Docket No. 05-63

Dear Ms. Dortch:

The Northern California Center on Deafness (NorCal) offers the Federal Communications Commission this letter of support for the merger of Sprint Corporation and Nextel Communications, Inc.

As a community-based nonprofit service agency committed to providing direct services to empower, educate, and advocate “of, by and for” deaf and hard of hearing residents in California’s 24-northeastern counties, we are pleased to have this rare opportunity to be asked to express our support.

Since its inception in 1977, NorCal’s mission has been to assist deaf and hard of hearing individuals live independently and productively within the greater society; to educate the general public, family members, service providers, and employers of the unique communication needs, on the wide-range of abilities of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children and Adults. The most important goal is always and forever, to advocate for equal access to create opportunities, in all walks of life, for this population NorCal serves.

As an advocacy and service organization for all individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing, NorCal has observed Sprint’s commitment here in California to continue to serve Deaf and Hard of Hearing members of our communities. Nationally, Sprint is known as the largest provider of telecommunications relay service (TRS), was one of the first corporations to hire individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing in key management positions, and was also one of the first to be creative in finding solutions to meet the communication access needs of specific segments of the population we serve: STS relay for speech-impaired individuals, English to Spanish Relay, VCO with traditional TTY relay, more recent years showed innovative approaches with products featuring online internet relay, video relay services, and captioned telephone services (Captel). All of which defines a company who believes in educating its consumer population while moving toward its own goals. Such goals are parallel to that of NorCal’s for equal communication access, specifically in this case – functionally equivalent equal telecommunication services.

I am pleased to also learn that TRS will continue to be an important part of this new, combined company and should be the case in determining whether or not to approve any merger. Such

commitment is important from the Deaf Consumer's point of view, and even more so important for the FCC to measure how such mergers will ensure that its goals are in alignment with the grassroots deaf and hard of hearing consumers communication needs. Its simply time to consider companies who are committed to serving all Americans, not just the ones who are within a specific salary bracket and can hear.

As we move into the era of Wireless industry with advanced technologies, by combining their resources, the benefits of the Sprint Nextel merger should be obvious to those within the general population, and soon will be to the deaf community. The more competitive solutions that are out there to meet the needs of the Consumer population NorCal serves, the better and more creative innovations, especially new products to incorporate all Americans who have different language needs, all of which can only serve to benefit and help the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community reach our goal for more functional equivalence products and services as a result. We fully expect, with Sprint's leadership, for this new combined company to ensure future designs and products are made with the Deaf Consumer in mind. Especially with the additional plans of Sprint Nextel to provide advanced communication systems to the public safety community, we too in the deaf community, are in dire need of more solutions for ways the Public Safety Answering Points can respond to emergencies in ways that the Deaf Consumer can easily access.

Thank you for your consideration supporting this matter: Sprint Nextel.

I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have about the merger's impact on the deaf and hard of hearing community. Feel free to contact me at the email address listed below.

Thank you,

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