



# NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF

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April 25, 2005

The Honorable Chairman Kevin Martin  
Federal Communications Commission  
455 Twelfth Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554

*Re: Applications for Consent to the Transfer of Control of Licenses and Authorizations from Nextel to Sprint, WT Docket No. 05-63*

Dear Chairman Martin,

It gives me great pleasure, on behalf of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), to write in support of the proposed Sprint-Nextel merger.

The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) has been safeguarding the civil rights of deaf and hard of hearing Americans since 1880. As a national federation of state association, organizational and corporate affiliates, the advocacy work of the NAD encompasses a broad spectrum of areas including, but not limited to, accessibility, education, employment, healthcare, mental health, rehabilitation, technology, telecommunications, and transportation. The vision of the NAD is that every deaf and hard of hearing individual can and will participate fully in all aspects of society and life without barriers

Membership within the NAD covers a broad range of constituencies, including deaf, hard of hearing, late deafened and deaf blind individuals who are professionals, leaders, and consumers who work within the government, nonprofit and corporate sectors. Members also include parents and family members; retirees who remain active in civic and community service; youth from mainstream and residential education programs as well as colleges and universities; as well as administrators, educators, support service providers.

The advent of text messaging and the growth of the Internet have begun to level the playing field for deaf and hard of hearing consumers. But, deaf and hard of hearing individuals are no different than their hearing peers in the need for access to communication for safety and as a lifeline. Self-sufficiency and independence goes hand in hand with communication accessibility. Our members and supporters want functional equivalency—more specifically, they want access to the same services and products made available to those who can hear.

Sprint has long been sensitive to the needs of the deaf and hard of hearing community and is a proven leader as the nation's largest provider of telecommunications relay services (TRS). Sprint is a proven innovator in their service offerings such as Internet Relay, Video Relay, and CapTel. Sprint Relay, too, has been a long time supporter of the National Association of the Deaf, providing much needed assistance for redesign the NAD website, as well as by being a leading sponsor for biennial national conferences. They are also inclusive in their approach to product and service development, making sure that the community they serve is involved right from the start.

A Sprint-Nextel merger would be very beneficial to NAD constituencies, and equally as important, to the nations deaf and hard of hearing community. The merger would also go a long way toward strengthening the commitment for provision of innovative communications solutions for persons with disabilities, extend the range of Sprint products and services across a wider spectrum, and will allow for investment in networks that will enable expansion of interactive wireless multimedia services. The merger, combining the rich resources and expertise inherent to both Sprint and Nextel would also accelerate the availability of video and multimedia applications to people with disabilities, particularly to those who use American Sign Language.

The merger will also ensure that Sprint-Nextel emerges as a major player in both the wireless and relay arenas. We ask that the FCC take steps to ensure that the merged company's video applications with respect to both wireless services and video relay services are compatible and interoperable. Accordingly, we encourage the FCC to take proactive steps to ensure that the merger will result in products and services that are more aligned than ever to the Americans with Disabilities Title IV requirements for functional equivalency.

Again, on behalf of the Board of Directors, members and supporters of the National Association of the Deaf, I wish to reiterate our enthusiastic support for the proposed Sprint-Nextel merger and the promise that it holds for expansion of accessible products and services geared to the needs of deaf and hard of hearing Americans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy J. Bloch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nancy J. Bloch  
Chief Executive Officer