



August 23, 2012

VIA ELECTRONIC FILING

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

RE: Notice of *Ex Parte* Meeting
CG Docket Nos. 12-38 and 03-123

Dear Ms. Dortch:

On Tuesday, August 21, 2012, Claude Stout of the Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Inc. (TDI), Lise Hamlin of the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) and Andrew Phillips of the National Association for the Deaf (NAD) (collectively, “the Consumer Groups”) met with Karen Peltz Strauss, Gregory Hlibok, Robert Aldrich and Eliot Greenwald of the Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau (CGB), Jonathan Chambers of the Office of Strategic Policy (OSP), Richard Hovey of the Wireline Competition Bureau (WCB), and Henning Schulzrinne, Chief Technology Officer to discuss a possible third party registration system for IP Relay and possibly other forms of Telecommunication Relay Service (TRS).

The Consumer Groups support a third party registration system. In our meeting, we stressed the importance of IP Relay as a TRS for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. When asked about how many deaf and hard of hearing people use IP Relay, we explained that while most deaf and hard of hearing people prefer other forms of TRS such as Video Relay Service (VRS) or IP Captioned Telephone Service (IP CTS), it’s our understanding that a large percent have IP Relay accounts and use IP Relay as a backup when their primary form of TRS is unavailable. For example, many deaf and hard of hearing people use IP Relay to make relay calls when they are outside of the home and are using the wireless network to make their TRS calls. Many wireless networks are not fast enough to support good quality VRS calls. Moreover, IP Relay is often the only way someone who is deaf or hard of hearing can reach 911 while outside of the home – such as following a car accident.

The Consumer Groups reiterated our stance that that registration must not be burdensome or intrusive for deaf and hard of hearing people. The meeting largely focused on two important registration issues: 1) the need to verify the identity of the registrant, and 2) the need to ensure that the system is being used to provide telecommunication access to deaf and hard of hearing people. We discussed various registration mechanisms which could be used to achieve these goals.

With regard to the first goal, the Consumer Groups indicated full opposition to requiring users to provide or verify their Social Security numbers to receive TRS. However, we are open to having a verification system which allows users a number of choices in the kind of verification information they provide. For instance, a user could be given the option to submit his/her Social Security number for the purpose of verification if he/she feels comfortable with it, or instead could submit his/her drivers license number or a different form of indentifying information. Given the large number of users who will need to register and the harsh penalty of not being allowed to register, it is very important to provide flexibility since some users might not have all the required information necessary to register, if the registration requirements are too onerous. Any information collected or verified must not be used for any purpose other than TRS registration and it needs to be given the highest level of privacy protection.

As for the second goal, we expressed deep concerns about requiring people to submit documentation or proof that they are deaf or hard of hearing, such as with an audiogram. We believe that the best way to determine whether a person is indeed deaf or hard of hearing is through self-identification. This will ensure that all deaf and hard of hearing people are able to benefit from relay services and none will inadvertently be denied necessary telecommunications access. While we understand why the FCC may want more than self-identification for verification, we are skeptical that there is a reasonable or good way to achieve this goal. Requiring an audiogram or similar documentation begs the question of who is deaf or hard of hearing and what level of hearing a person must have in order to use TRS. We believe that this is a dangerous road to go down since there may be people who need TRS but could be deemed not deaf or hard of hearing enough. We do not believe that verifying one's disability for the purpose of TRS will be well received by the community.

The Consumer Groups understand that the FCC is considering a system that may require more than self-identification for verification that the applicant is deaf or hard of hearing. The Consumer Groups strongly believe that self-identification is sufficient for verification purposes and that any additional verification is an added layer of burden that is solely imposed on deaf and hard of hearing consumers. If the FCC nevertheless decides to impose additional verification requirements, we explained that such methods should not be intrusive, burdensome, or carry a cost to the consumer. We discussed the importance of multiple options for verifying a person is deaf or hard of hearing including the possibility of having disinterested people like vocational rehabilitation counselors, school counselors or even organizations that serve deaf and hard of hearing people providing such verification. Whatever methods of identification and verification the FCC chooses, we discussed the need for periodic review for effectiveness and ease of use by consumers so that changes could be made if needed.

In closing, the Consumer Groups stressed the need to do extensive outreach to the deaf and hard of hearing community if a new kind of registration system is adopted. We also stated our strong support for the FCC in its efforts to reduce TRS fraud.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrew S. Phillips". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Andrew S. Phillips, Esq.
Policy Counsel

cc: Karen Peltz Strauss (CGB)
Gregory Hlibok (CGB)
Robert Aldrich (CGB)
Eliot Greenwald (CGB)
Jonathan Chambers (OSP)
Richard Hovey (WCB)
Henning Schulzrinne, Chief Technology Officer