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For Immediate Release

FCC FURTHER EXTENDS TEMPORARY WAIVERS FOR RELAY SERVICES RULES DURING PANDEMIC

Action Will Ensure Providers Can Continue to Meet the Needs of Americans with Disabilities

WASHINGTON, June 22, 2020—The FCC’s Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau today extended temporary waivers through August 31, 2020 for Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) providers to ensure relay services remain available during the COVID-19 pandemic for individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, or have a speech disability.

These waivers extend actions previously taken to grant TRS providers flexibility to deal with reduced staffing and increased call volumes, to enable more of their employees to provide services from their homes, and to expand the pool of contractors qualified to provide American Sign Language interpretation services for Video Relay Service. Today’s action also extends waivers that enable Internet Protocol Relay Service communications assistants to provide service from home workstations and to allow registered VRS users to make calls to the U.S. from abroad during the national emergency.

Although many states have lifted “stay-at-home” orders through various phased reopening approaches, many restrictions remain in effect with uncertain timetables for their removal, and many employers continue to maintain much of their workforce working remotely.

“Weighing the need for vital communications services and factoring in the uncertainty surrounding the differing approaches to reopening across jurisdictions, we feel it’s clear this action is necessary to ensure reliable, uninterrupted TRS is available for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, or have speech disabilities,” said Patrick Webre, Chief of the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau.

Telecommunications relay services are supported through the FCC-administered Interstate TRS Fund. The FCC remains committed to the integrity of the TRS program, to guarding against waste, fraud, and abuse, and to ensuring that funds disbursed through the TRS program are used for appropriate purposes.

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).