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For Immediate Release

FCC TO VOTE ON IMPROVING ACCESS TO VIDEO CONFERENCING SERVICES

New Performance Objectives Would Include Accurate and Synchronous Captioning, Access To Third-Party Captioning and Sign Language Interpretation and More

WASHINGTON, September 4, 2024—FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel today announced the Commission will vote during its September Open Meeting on new rules to ensure that people with disabilities can fully participate in video conferencing, including by the use of telecommunications relay services.

“During the pandemic so many people counted on video conferencing services like Zoom and Teams to stay connected and keep up with work, healthcare and so much more,” **said Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel**. “We know these technologies can help facilitate all kinds of interactions that are vital in modern life. So we are making sure that these services are fully accessible for people with disabilities.”

The Communications Act requires providers of advanced communications services—including “interoperable video conferencing services” (IVCS)—and manufacturers of equipment used for these services to ensure that their services, equipment, and software are accessible to people with disabilities, unless that is not achievable. In 2022, the Commission resolved a longstanding legal question, finding that all services meeting the statutory definition of IVCS (i.e., providing “real-time video communications, including audio, to enable users to share information of the user’s choosing”) must comply with the accessibility requirements of the law.

Video conferencing poses unique challenges for participation by people with disabilities, and implementation of accessibility is highly uneven. Further, the provision of video relay service and other forms of Telecommunications Relay Services is not fully integrated with video conferencing. If adopted, the new rules would take major steps to resolve these problems, updating the Commission’s accessibility performance objectives and facilitating the integrated provision of Video Relay Service and other relay services with video conferencing.

The Chairwoman is circulating her proposal today to her fellow Commissioners for their review. As is the general practice, a draft of the proposal – officially a Second Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking – will be made public on Thursday on FCC.gov. At the Commission’s September 26 Open Meeting, the Commissioners will consider and vote on the proposal.

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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).