



The Nation's Voice for People with Hearing Loss

Via electronic filing

October 26, 2015

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Ex parte letter re: Wireless Hearing Aid Compatibility Regulations,
WT Docket Nos. 07-250, 10-254

Dear Ms. Dortch,

Hearing Loss Association of America, Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and the National Association of the Deaf provide the following ex parte comments regarding Hearing Aid Compatible (HAC) rules for wireless handsets.

Access to HAC wireless handsets has long been a goal for people with hearing loss. When mobile technology moved from analog to digital in the 1990's, it created a huge barrier for people with hearing loss – suddenly people with hearing loss who could use wireless handsets were faced with interference when they held the phone to their ear. It wasn't until 2003 that the Federal Communications Commission (Commission) determined that the complete exemption from HAC for wireless handsets would have an adverse effect on individuals with hearing disabilities and that limiting the exemption was technologically feasible and in the public interest. For all that time, people with hearing loss waited for access to hearing aid compatible phones.

Over time, the Consumer Groups and wireless industry (Industry) have worked together on HAC issues. We have all been part of working groups under the auspices of ATIS, we have held ad hoc meetings, we have met with the Commission. And progress has been made. We are heartened to learn that at least 82%¹ of mobile phones on the market have an M3 or M4 rating and 66%² of wireless handsets are rated T3 or T4. We applaud the Industry for making these great strides technically as well as for reaching out to work with consumer groups. We see this as a continuation of a positive approach by the Industry that we very much want to be part of.

¹ See Ex Parte Letter of TIA Request for Updated Information and Comment on Wireless hearing Aid Compatibility Regulations, WT Docket Nos. 07-250, 10-254 (filed July 22, 2015) at 3.

² Ibid.

Still, over all these years, the Consumer Groups' goal has remained unchanged: we want to see 100% of wireless handsets built to be hearing aid compatible.

The Industry recently reached out to the Consumer Groups to discuss their recent proposal for HAC rule changes. It's our understanding that the Industry is proposing a modification of the HAC rule to require both manufacturers and service providers to increase the percentage of M- and T-rated HAC wireless handsets they sell to 66%. While the Consumer Groups see an increase in the benchmarks as a positive move, we also see the 66% benchmark as just not enough. If adopted, Industry's proposal would leave fully a third of wireless handsets potentially unusable for people with hearing aids or cochlear implants.

Consumer Groups are committed to continuing a constructive dialog with Industry, with the goal of arriving at a consensus-based proposal. We see the dialog as valuable not only in finding a path to ensure that 100% of wireless handsets are HAC, but to also work together to address any other issue of mutual concern. We are eager to continue those kinds of discussions and look forward to working with the Industry and the Commission to ensure greater access to wireless handsets for all consumers with hearing loss.

Sincerely,

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