

HLAA, the FCC and You

BY LISE HAMLIN

At HLAA's Virtual Convention 2021, we were honored to have our keynote address delivered by the acting chairwoman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), Jessica Rosenworcel. Her comments were wide ranging and on point for people with hearing loss. We very much appreciate that Acting Chairwoman Rosenworcel took the time to be part of our Virtual Convention this year.

HLAA has been working with the FCC on a number of issues for a very long time. That just makes sense. After all, the FCC has jurisdiction over a wide range of issues that impact people with hearing loss. We file comments and hold meetings with the FCC to engage with the staff and the Commissioners to ensure that the perspective of people with hearing loss are included over a wide range of issues. For example:

- Telecommunications Relay Services (captioned phones and apps, videophones, TTYs)
- Closed captioning on television and over the internet
- Access to televised emergency information
- Access to advanced communications services and equipment
- Hearing aid compatibility with wireless and wireline telephones
- Access to 911 emergency services

In June 2021, the FCC issued a Public Notice to update the 21st Century Video and Communications Accessibility Act of 2010 (CVAA) regulations. HLAA signed onto comments drafted in concert with TDI (Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing) and other accessibility advocacy organizations and research organizations in response to that Public Notice.

HLAA believes the FCC should look into how we can make sure that any tools we use to communicate with others over phone lines or over the internet are accessible to all people with hearing loss and in fact all people with disabilities.

Our filed comments addressed a wide range of issues covered under CVAA, including the accessibility and usability of videoconferencing and other internet-based communication platforms. Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, so many of us, businesses, schools and colleges and even families became dependent on videoconferencing platforms like Zoom or Google Meet to simply communicate with each other. It's time to ensure that those platforms are accessible to all.

We also believe it's time to take a hard look at accessibility rules for video programming delivered over broadcast and cable TV. Should advertisements be required to be captioned? Should video programming between the time of 2 a.m. to 6 a.m. be included in captioning rules? Should programming on a video programming network for the first four years after it begins operation be exempt from captioning? In short, are the rules that were written in the last century still appropriate now?

Our comments didn't stop there. We also looked at the need to ensure that connectivity to wireless phones remain reliable, affordable and accessible for people with hearing loss. We commented on standards for amplification measurement of amplified phones and access to wideband and ultra-wideband audio services over VoIP phone lines. Wouldn't it be great to be able to connect to the phone with your hearing aid or cochlear implant and be assured that no matter what wired phone you used, you would not have interference with your hearing device, you would get the amplification you

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needed, and you would have access to a signal to get the best sound available over a wideband audio service?

The comments we filed are long and wide ranging. In the end, we hope to see the world of telecommunications more accessible. The FCC will need time to review and assess our comments on these topics. We will work with the FCC to ensure that our perspective is heard.

Of course we also realize the FCC may not agree with all we have to say. But we know they are listening. We have a place at the table. That is exactly where we want to be. **HL**

Lise Hamlin is director of public policy at HLAA. Reach out to her at lhamlin@hearingloss.org.

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