**FCC Chair Proposes**

**Accessible Video Conferencing**

Federal Communications Commission Chair Jessica Rosenworcel announced recently that she shared a proposal with her fellow Commissioners that would for the first time require video conferencing platforms, like Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Webex, to comply with the accessibility requirements under the Communications Act and agency rules that govern interoperable video conferencing services.

“The pandemic taught us all the value of video conferencing – to stay connected, to get work done, to stay in touch with our doctors, and much more. But for many people with disabilities, making effective use of these platforms continues to be a challenge,” said Rosenworcel. “Today, I’ve proposed taking a bold step in ensuring that video conferencing platforms are usable by all who rely on them to stay connected to their family, friends, co-workers and community.”

The Chairwoman circulated three related accessibility proposals. One is a “Report and Order” that finds that the accessibility requirements of section 716 of the Act and Part 14 of the Commission’s rules apply to all services and equipment meeting the definition of “interoperable video conferencing service.”

She also circulated a “Notice of Proposed Rulemaking” (NPRM) to amend Part 14 of Commission rules to add specific performance objectives for enhancing the accessibility of interoperable video conferencing services, including speech-to-text (captioning) capabilities; text-to-speech capabilities; and enabling the use of American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting. Additionally, the NPRM explores whether the Interstate Telephone Relay Fund can be used to support the integrated provision of relay service in video conferences, without connecting via a dial-up telephone call.

The third proposal is an order that waives for Video Relay Service (VRS) providers for one year, subject to conditions, a rule that restricts VRS users’ ability to turn off their video cameras when not actively participating in a video conference.

Sen. Edward Markey (D-Mass.), a member of the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee and author of the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act (CVAA), and Rep. Anna Eshoo (D-Calif.), senior member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, issued a joint statement after Rosenworcel’s announcement.

“People with disabilities deserve equal access to the tools and technologies that define life in the 21st century – and that includes video conferencing,” the statement said. “Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, video conferencing has become increasingly essential for work, education and healthcare, but many video conferencing services fall short for people with disabilities, leaving them disconnected.

“That’s why we introduced the “Communications, Video, and Technology Accessibility Act” in the last Congress, to require video conferencing platforms to incorporate built-in accessibility features, such as automatic captioning features, interpreters and other assistive technologies. We applaud Chairwoman Rosenworcel for her leadership and look forward to working with the FCC to ensure people with disabilities have full access to video conferencing platforms and other important services.”