



# WORLD

Technology News and Commentary for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People



**Arthur Yankilevich**  
SpaceX Welder



**Isidore Niyongabo**  
International Leader



**Roberta Mather**  
Parent and  
Community Leader



**Sean Markel**  
Deaf Activist

## Four Aspiring Young Deaf and Hard of Hearing Americans:

*Their Interesting Lives and Thoughts for Our Future*

*Starting on page 8*

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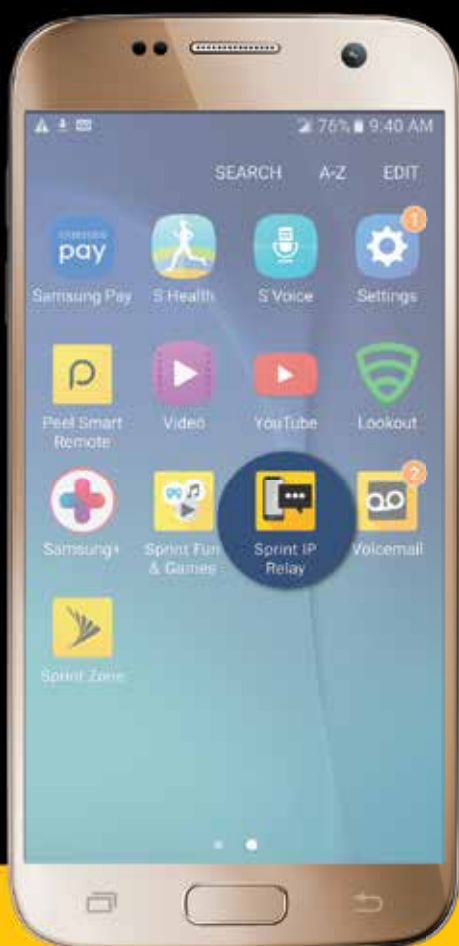
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& Full Communication Access - page 4**

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**Stamp Honoring Colombia Relay Service, page 23**

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## TDI'S MISSION

**"TDI provides leadership in achieving equal access to telecommunications, media, and information technologies for deaf and hard of hearing people."**

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**Shaping An Accessible World**

## Board Views



**SHEILA  
CONLON-MENTKOWSKI**

*TDI President and  
Board Member, West Region*

“It is important to welcome new members of all ages and hearing loss while retaining loyal members so we can more fully represent the great diversity of our country. We need a larger base of younger members to carry out our mission and vision.”



**L**ike Uncle Sam says on recruiting posters, “We want you!” Why, you may wonder? Read on! TDI continuously, through various efforts, seeks to recruit and retain members. Our mission is to monitor and assist in improving access to telecommunications, electronic media, captioning, 9-1-1 programs including text to 9-1-1, and other similar concepts. We are presently focusing on recruiting and retaining 18 to 35 year old hard of hearing, deaf, deaf blind, and other individuals to increase that demographic in our membership as well as to retain long established members. Our purpose is to provide

knowledge and experience to deaf and hard of hearing consumers of all ages. Our membership needs to be maintained and updated ongoing, so we have many voices and hands to show government agencies, telecommunications industry, and others in the field what our access needs are from beginning to end. It is important to welcome new members of all ages and hearing loss while retaining loyal members so we can more fully represent the great diversity of our country. We need a larger base of younger members to carry out our mission and vision. Without you, our group is small. With your membership





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## Capitol Commentary



BY CLAUDE STOUT  
TDI Executive Director

“We must have a good educational background, in some cases - prior work experience, and well-enforced equal opportunity employment rules in place for us to compete fairly for jobs. These technologies alone are still not helping some of us get jobs, or be promoted to a higher-level job. Also, it won't help us bring food to the table.”



## A Good Education, Equal Employment Opportunity, and Full Communication Access

*Vital for Future of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Youth in America*

In our fifty years' service at TDI, we have seen some real good progress made for our access needs. We have captions on TV, and some on the Internet. Today, we enjoy using computers, smart phones, tablets, videophones, captioned telephones, and other new technologies. We use relay services, either VRS, IP-CTS, or IP Relay. We have our watches keeping tabs for us on status of our health, and coaxing us to eat better and exercise more every day. In a few years, you will be able to make an emergency call with your smart phone, and not have to tell the 911 center where you are. They will track your call down to where you are, even down to which room and floor you are in a building, and come rescue you. We will have trials

soon in VRS to use highly skilled interpreters for legal, financial, and medical situations. In a few years, we will all use Real-Time Text (RTT), not TTYs anymore. But here, we are getting limited success. We must have a good educational background, in some cases - prior work experience, and well-enforced equal opportunity employment rules in place for us to compete fairly for jobs. These technologies alone are still not helping some of us get jobs, or be promoted to a higher-level job. Also, it won't help us bring food to the table.

Many of us are not doing well in education. Some schools for the deaf are doing a great job, and the rest of them can do better. I hear

**CAPITOL COMMENTARY** Continued from page 4

that today, about 86 percent of us are attending public schools. In 1974, when I graduated from N.C. School for the Deaf, Morganton, NC, I was among 80 per cent of those attending schools for the deaf. A good number of public schools are not providing quality education, and/or adequate communication support. Some of them do not impose high expectations on their deaf and hard of hearing students to succeed well in the classroom. Even some of their parents do not fully understand that they can benefit from exercising their IEP rights and privileges for their children. Let us all support CEASD and NAD for their efforts on Capitol Hill for the Alice Cogswell and Anne Sullivan Macy Act.

Many of us are not well-prepared or given a fair chance to compete for opportunities in today's labor market. According to a report, titled Deaf People and Employment in the United States: 2016 by National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes, in 2014, only 48% of deaf people were employed, compared to 72% of hearing people. This report provides a comprehensive overview of the most current data on employment trends and trajectories for deaf individuals in the United States, serving as a resource for community members, advocates, educators, researchers, and policy makers. The Center used data from the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS), a national survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, limiting their focus to individuals aged 21 to 64 years, or the "working age" population.

We must ask government officials, educational institutions and the business community some serious questions. Are K-12 schools' curriculum and instruction revised on a regular basis for us to qualify

for jobs a few months, two years, five years, ten years, or twenty years from now? Today and in the future, we must be able to have jobs at all levels - from entry-level up to top management level. In the past, we have performed well as post office clerks, printers, and teachers, etc. America's workforce is now more technology-related. Will we be adequately prepared to take part in information technology, automation/robotics, education, telecommunications, transportation, medicine, law, finance, and etc.? The real question is are we adequately prepared to do any of these jobs, and perform well to the expectations of our work supervisors? To be prepared, we go to a college or a university, or even a nearby community college. Or you can take courses online. We must ask schools, parents, neighbors, community service centers, VR counselors, and local government officials to help us get training and then apply for jobs. Keep asking until you are satisfied!

We do bring unique skills and abilities to the workplace. Uber tells us that there are now over 3,000 deaf and hard of hearing individuals working for them as full-time or part-time drivers. Many hearing people love it when they have deaf and hard of hearing drivers. Amazon is considering setting up a second headquarters in the East Coast, and we must work with this company to hire some of us for its new facility. We have a deaf couple owning a pizza business, Mozzarella in the SF, CA area. We have a number of deaf and hard of hearing doctors and dentists. Some of us know how to operate 18-wheelers, forklifts, or even large farm equipment. The list goes on and on. Try us and you will find us as better workers!

Too many of us are not getting full communication access. We

are getting good interpreters and CART services in some places in government, and the marketplace. In some areas, we do not get good interpreters or CART services, or none at all. Too often when we ask for our preferred communication service, we get the wrong kind of support, especially VRI in hospitals for certain situations. Make sure you ask hard questions in your local communities: 1.) how many ASL classes and interpreter training programs are in my local area? This is very important as ASL classes serve what I call "baseball farm system support" to interpreter training programs. 2.) how many interpreters are in my local area? There are so many interpreters working full time or part time in over 150 VRS call centers, that we appear not to have enough interpreters for education and community-based settings. 3.) how many CART writers are in my local area? Are there a nearby CART writer/court reporter training program in my local area? We need as many skilled/experienced CART writers to provide us captions in meetings and conferences, even for relay services and captioning of TV programs and movies. We must have a national system, maybe a registry to oversee training for, outreach and education on, and availability and quality of interpreting/CART services.

We must work together to expand the pool of interpreters and CART writers for the future. Otherwise, those responsible won't be held as accountable for not providing us access.

It is important that we initiate, build, and maintain relations on policy issues with federal/state/local government agencies, and to develop partnerships with accessibility offices of industry and business.



## Forward Together

APRIL 13, 2018



BY TAYLER MAYER  
Managing Editor

**“Your membership is helping make a difference among thousands of deaf and hard of hearing Americans.”**

### ***Paying Membership Dues Online is Back!***

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<https://tdiforaccess.org>

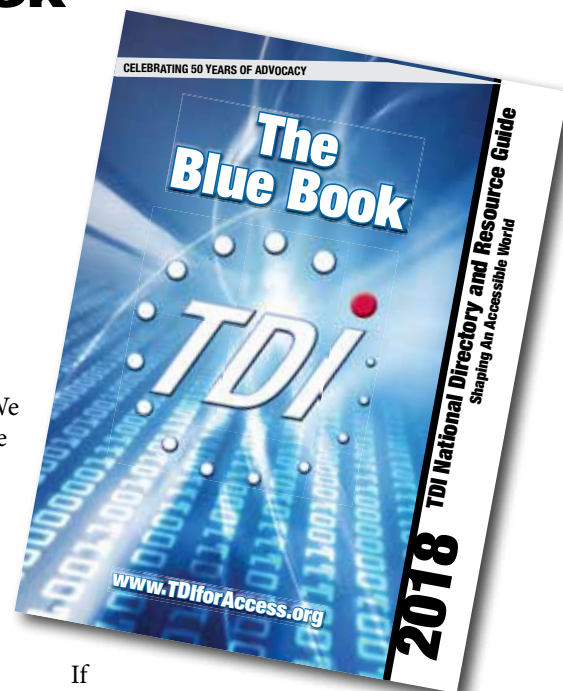
## TDI is more than the Blue Book

**T**his column is my parting words, the last column as managing editor of TDI World Magazine. As the Director of Public Relations for TDI for the past year and half, I’ve gained insight on our services which some of the members value.

As an added value, we proudly offer the yearly TDI Blue Book, a national directory of contact information of deaf individuals and organizations. We also publish the TDI World Magazine quarterly. Those two important publications, on top of informing our members of the progress TDI is making through the “TDI in Action” columns, offer something to our members in return for your continued membership.

I write “added value”, because the publications are in addition to TDI’s purpose. We are more than our publications. Our true purpose is to advocate for better accessibility in many things we use and depend upon, may it be our smartphone, television or videophone. We are continually meeting with key players in the technology industry offering feedback on how to improve their services and products with deaf and hard of hearing consumers in mind. TDI makes a number of filings monthly with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), totaling in the thousands in recent decades.

What makes this possible is your support. Without your membership or donations, TDI wouldn’t be able to advocate for accessibility. Your membership is important. There are several circumstances requiring TDI to be an organization - with members. That is to say without members, we wouldn’t be eligible to participate in certain coalitions or meetings.



If the TDI Blue Book is the sole reason you are a TDI member, we are happy to offer the directory. However do realize that your membership does more than that - your membership is helping make a difference among thousands of deaf Americans. If you are a TDI member with the goal of supporting advocacy work in Washington D.C., - deaf and hard of hearing Americans thank you. We have made and will continue to make progress since TDI’s founding 50 years ago.

On October 25, 2018, TDI will host a gala recognizing the work of TDI over the 50 years. Join us for our anniversary in Bethesda, Maryland. Witness the accomplishments, and be inspired to continue your support of TDI. Remember, it is your membership and donations that makes it possible for TDI to continue its work. Thank you and hope to see you on October 25.

Forward together!





**BOARD VIEW** Continued from page 2

and participation in technology and telecommunications, we show strength.

Do you like captions on movies, TV shows, Internet videos, Public Service Announcements (PSA), text to 9-1-1, visual smoke alarms everywhere you go in the USA, captions on TVs in hospitals, hotels, restaurants, and other places where you may see a TV? Do you travel? You would appreciate text alerts informing you of bad weather in the areas you are and will be traveling through. Sometimes protests and marches disrupt traffic so those types of alerts for travelers and residents in the area are helpful.

TDI makes constant efforts to strive to stay on top of technological advances, emerging technology, and work with companies from concept idea to final product as it is much easier to incorporate design that is accessible from the outset rather than to have to redo the design or product afterward to make the product or service accessible. Our motto is "TDI: Shaping an Accessible World."

Looking at the 18 to 35 year old demographic, what is this group interested and involved in? Admittedly, it is a wide range in age but still there are some common denominators in the hard of hearing, deaf, and deaf blind groups. We all need access to the telecommunication network, whether that is VRS, TRS, or other means of telecommunication for unique groups such as deaf blind consumers. Social media is another platform we can keep in touch with on various issues, programs, developing technology, and other topics. The use of captioning is increasing on the Internet, You Tube videos, and videos

elsewhere.

What tools does TDI offer for members so they don't have to start inventing the wheel again? TDI has a website, [www.tdiforaccess.org](http://www.tdiforaccess.org) which is updated on a regular basis with information on various technologies, emergency preparedness, and other general resources. The website also lists FCC actions, comment periods, and other governmental actions. There is a guideline on how to interact effectively with the FCC. If you wish to interact with TDI as an organization, you can contact us via our web page through the URL provided earlier. We welcome interaction on telecommunications technology, emergency preparedness, and similar issues and topics. Let us know what inventions, services, programs, applications, and others that you find assist and enable deaf and hard of hearing people to live and work independently. You can send us comments to our website or to [info@TDIforAccess.org](mailto:info@TDIforAccess.org).

We also have a main TDI Facebook page along with regional pages representing each region of the country. Search "TDI" in the Facebook search engine and various TDI pages should show up. You can select the region of the USA you reside in. We have a main page along with regional FB pages reflecting the 5 regions. We update the TDI Facebook pages with information related to text to 9-1-1 alerts, captioning in different venues, alerts, and other news, etc. we also send out eNotes on vacancies, important issues, and the like. "TDI World", a magazine type publication, is also published throughout the year and sent to members and sponsors. The last issue focused on the FCC Disability Advisory Committee (DAC)

and its purpose as well as the members and staff who work with the DAC. The "Blue Book" is the annual directory with historic milestones and resources available along with residential and business listings all over the USA. We also publish TDI eNotes that focus on one topic, one example being TDI's Conference dates and call for papers. The eNotes also share position announcements for organizations our members might be interested in or share with their colleagues. To subscribe to get the eNotes, send an email to [PubRel@TDIforaccess.org](mailto:PubRel@TDIforaccess.org). These eNotes also are used to send out updates on events such as the upcoming 50th Anniversary Gala on October 25, 2018 at the Bethesda North Marriott Hotel, North Bethesda, Maryland.

And last but not least, TDI hosts a conference every two years. The theme of the last one in 2017 was "The Innovative Advocate: Staying Ahead of Communication Technology". The next conference will take place in mid 2019. The conferences are a means to keep up to date on telecommunications and technology for deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind consumers. There are workshops, panels, plenary sessions, and exhibits during the multi day conference. Watch for the date and location of the 2019 TDI Conference later this year. Do consider joining us at a conference or the Gala in October. We look forward to seeing you there!

*Sheila Conlon Mentkowski*  
President, TDI  
Board member, West Region





# arthur yankilevich

## SpaceX Welder

**A**rthur Yankilevich, 31 years old, has lived all his life in Southern California, in the Los Angeles area. Becoming deaf at age 3 due to a high fever, he is the only deaf member in his family. Attending the Tripod school in Burbank, CA, he eventually received his high school degree from an adult school then attended community college acquiring certification in general trade skills.

Pushing ahead in his education after working for a few years, he chose to attend the Fab School, which specialized in fabrication. Jumping from job to job, Arthur learned skills on the job, including welding. Having taken particular interest in aerospace welding, he is currently on his fourth job in the high skills industry.

Today, Arthur is a welder at SpaceX, a private aerospace company building rockets. Founded by Elon Musk, some of SpaceX rockets are the world's first reusable rockets. Instead of boosters falling into the ocean rendering them useless, SpaceX boosters land by themselves. Being in reusable condition, they can



be used again and again — a significant savings in the millions. The boosters land either on a ocean vessel or land.

The SpaceX self-landing boosters are named Falcon Heavy. Arthur welded parts which are found on Falcon Heavy, both the boosters and main rocket.

Arthur recalls the day he came into SpaceX headquarters in Hawthorne, California. He had been called in for an interview. He would have to take a welding exam as part of the interview.

There are three classes, or levels, of welding: Class A, B and C. Jobs done by Class A welders are inspected by X-rays 100% of the time. Class B jobs are inspected approximately 50% of the time, and Class B are not inspected by x-rays. To reduce work backlogs, the welder must pass X-ray inspections 95% of the time. If the 95% threshold isn't met, the welder will be transferred to a different section to weld in a lower class.

At the interview, the Human

## YANKILEVICH Continued from page 8

Resources recruiter explained in order to qualify for class C, Arthur would be given three tries, and for Class B, he can have two tries. The highest level, Class A, Arthur would have only one try. Additionally, in Class A, if a welder fails the exam, the exam cannot be re-taken for one year.

Arthur wanted to try Class A exam. The SpaceX recruiter double checked to make sure he was positive, emphasizing that he would not be able to re-take the exam for another year. Arthur replied that he understood - that he had only one shot.

Unlike other aerospace welding exams, one caveat of SpaceX's exam was that he could not move the metal parts he was welding.

After concluding the exam quickly, the recruiter, not believing Arthur completed the exam, explained what the exam involved. Arthur reasserted that he met the exam's expectations.

The recruiter once again tried to explain the exam, not wanting to ruin Arthur's one-shot attempt.

Arthur repeated that he met the exam requirements.

With doubts, the recruiter asked if the weld was "penetrating", an welding term. Arthur replied, "Yes". "Was the weld purged?" "Yes", said Arthur. The recruiter then inspected the welding - and was surprised.

The recruiter then asked Arthur to clean up the site. Arthur wasn't sure if he was hired. The recruiter led Arthur to a different room and was asked to wait. The sign language interpreter shared with Arthur the recruiter was overheard telling the welding supervisor that Arthur was a "top welder".

Soon, the supervisor walked up to Arthur, saying "Welcome to SpaceX!"



Partner: Amanda Carey girlfriend of 14 years, daughter 11, son 9, son 2.

Asked if Arthur thought deaf welders, because they are deaf, had better abilities in certain areas, he readily agreed saying that deaf people in general have better hands and eyes coordination and work better with their hands. He added that five other deaf SpaceX welders and engineers are "pretty much the top in their departments."

Since starting his welding career, Arthur believes he has helped hundreds of deaf people find jobs, either by connecting them with job openings or helping to revise their resumes. He also gives advice on how to approach interviewers. Arthur has helped friends who are local and out of state. Understanding firsthand the frustrations of a deaf job seeker and not wanting others to go through it, Arthur shares his experiences to break employment barriers.

Arthur feels that people, especially recruiters, overlook the fact that deaf workers can possess skills that are equal to their hearing counterparts, if not better.

Speaking with long-time workers in the aerospace industry, Arthur learned that several decades ago there were hundreds of deaf employees in the

industry. Today, there are few. Arthur believes it is more difficult for a deaf person to obtain employment in today's climate. Citing high skills as a reason, he believes deaf workers, more than ever, need to pursue education options to increase their skill level.

Instead of technology creating opportunities for deaf individuals, in the highly competitive world, more job positions are requiring advanced skills relating to technology.

The challenges Arthur experiences in the workplace are highlighted by interpreter issues. Instead of hiring full-time interpreters on the ready for impromptu meetings, interpreters are booked ahead of time making such types of meetings impossible for him to fully participate. Arthur states it is not unusual to have last minute meetings called, making it difficult to secure interpreter services.

For meetings with booked interpreters, occasionally they are cancelled. The interpreters are still paid regardless. The Human Resources department, responsible for hiring interpreters, are therefore less motivated to book, and compensate for, interpreters they might not use.

Making pleas for interpreters, he has noticed interpreters are present in his meetings more frequently.

Another workplace accessibility issue he notices is he has a videophone station which does not work. Repeated requests with the IT department has fallen on deaf ears, not understanding how beneficial Video Relay Services are to him as a deaf caller.

As with the interpreters situation, he continues to advocate for himself in the workplace. Notwithstanding the issue, Arthur is proud to be a SpaceX employee, and also how far he has come in the aerospace industry and of how he has helped others gain employment.



# Isidore Niyongabo

## International Leader

**1.) Briefly introduce yourself. Were you born deaf/hard of hearing or did this occur in later life? Where did you grow up? Did you have a deaf family or a hearing family? What job do you have and with whom?**

I was born hearing and did not become Deaf until I was 10 years old due to spinal meningitis. Born and raised in Burundi, I grew up in the north eastern rural region of Burundi. After I become Deaf, my father took me on a 13 hours bicycle ride to a School for the Deaf in Gitega, which is in the central region. I also attended High School in mainstreamed program in the same city.

**2.) What have you done for the deaf and hard of hearing community? Which organizations are you heavily involved with, and why you enjoy doing things with these groups?**

Early in 2009 I was a Sophomore at San Diego State University when I founded the SDSU ASL Club, which now has grown and also created a movement

on campus that advocated for the opening of ASL classes to all students after the University suspended the program indefinitely in 2009.

It was not until 2 years ago that the university finally listened to our request and reinstated ASL classes for all. It was for this cause that I was honored as the SDSU's 2010 Homecoming King, being the first deaf person to win this prestigious and competitive award.

I was then inspired to start International Deaf Education, Advocacy and Leadership (IDEAL), Inc.; an international non-profit organization that currently provide scholarships to children and youth in sub-Saharan Africa along with leadership capacity building for young deaf leaders globally.

With my commitment at Convo, I continue to give back to the community through these organizations, and also continuing to expand our world of signers through my everyday life. Inspired through my passion to dance, I

recently founded Omnidanza, a company that focuses on teaching Latin dancing to both deaf and hearing through visual cues and physical connection while consulting with music industries and entertainment companies to create a space that is inclusive where deaf dancers can partake in the joy of music.

The altruistic person that I am finds passion in doing things that will create a world that is better than what I grew in. I am an advocate by passion and education, a philanthropist by heart and a dancer in all that I do. It is through what I do that I find life to be meaningful. To add, I do not give because I have much, but because I know firsthand what it is like to have nothing at all.

**3.) What is your vision for the future of the deaf and hard of hearing community? Are you optimistic or frustrated, or both with what is generally happening in America?**

My vision for the future of the deaf and hard of hearing

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NIYONGABO Continued from page 10

community is a world where many hearing people will know sign language. When this happens, deafness will no longer be a disability. I envision a world where we will all be communicating in sign language, when we will no longer identify deaf person based on sign language nor a hearing person based on hearing, but instead, our diverse and shared abilities.

With organizations like Convo and TDI investing more into innovative solutions aiming to improve communication access that are universally designed for all of us, the future is bright for deaf and hard of hearing people. In fact, what is happening in America is more than often inspiring to the rest of the world, be in positive or negative way,

there is always someone who will be motivated to create something better.

**4.) How best can TDI can serve yours and others' needs and issues in telecommunications, media, and information services in the near future? Are there some areas you feel we should work on, that we haven't had in the recent past? Are you aware of our work with the FCC for areas like emergency communication, relay services, captioning on TV and the Internet, broadband access, and etc.?**

I am aware that TDI is doing a lot of work globally, However I think more visibility and more outreach will be more helpful to address global communication access issues and more. I myself, even though I have been in the United States for more than 10 years, I did

not know this organization until a couple years ago.

Connecting with College students, global non-profit organizations, and young professionals in some way will help build a strong coalition of Deaf leaders around the world to improve communication access, promote the UNCRPD in the area of communication, and inclusion especially in rapidly evolving technology industries.

Yes, I am aware of TDI's involvement in the FCC and I enjoy working with TDI Executive Director, Claude Stout on many issues. He always has a strong point and he is always bringing people together to ensure that we unite our effort in proposing the right policies that will benefit our Deaf and hard of hearing community in the long run.





# Roberta Mather

Parent and Community Leader

**1.) Briefly introduce yourself. Were you born deaf/hard of hearing or did this occur in later life? Where did you grow up? Did you have a deaf family or a hearing family?**

Born and raised in a deaf family, I am a second-generation deaf individual who happens to have deaf children. I originally was hard of hearing but had a hearing loss as a toddler. Even at then, I had a strong sense of "Deaf" identity. I remember having a conversation with my mom, when I must have been 3 or 4, walking down from the local school asking why I went to two schools – one for the deaf and another with hearing peers. She wanted to give me options. So, my reply, "But, I am Deaf." At that moment she knew my identity.

From K to 8, I attended Kendall Demonstration Elementary School for the Deaf, a national model school on Gallaudet University campus. By the time I arrived at high school, I decided to give a mainstream experience a try and attended Rockville High School. Upon graduation, I attended Rochester Institute of Technology, where I got my Bachelor of Science in Professional Technical Communications and minors

in Information Technology and Business/Marketing. Over the course of years, I have taken countless trainings in leadership, technology and project management.

In addition to being raised in a deaf family, I also had extended family members who are deaf, including uncles and aunts. Because of that, hearing relatives (including Siblings of Deaf Adults and Children of Deaf Adults), could sign and fingerspell. Because everyone could communicate with each other, we always had access to information.

Today, I am raising two Deaf children with my husband who is Deaf. I currently work at the U.S. Department of State as a marketing officer.

**2.) What have you done for the deaf and hard of hearing community? Which organizations are you heavily involved with, and why you enjoy doing things with these groups?**

I am a firm believer of giving back to the community, especially our youth. Over the course of years, I have been involved in various organizations including Deaf in Government, and District of

Columbia Association of the Deaf. When I became a mother of Deaf children, my interest shifted into deaf youth. I saw a void in events and resources for deaf and hard of hearing children, which could be easily filled. The first step I did was serve as the President of Kendall Parent Teacher Association. I have been involved with Lead-K, and have assisted camps like Camp Mark Seven with their social media efforts. My ultimate goal is to create opportunities for deaf children so that they have equal footing in life.

My newest interest is empowering deaf children to give back to the community. After all, children who empower others empower themselves. In the past couple of months, I hosted an event where Deaf tween girls assembled "Self Love" care packages for survivors and their children through Deaf Abused Women Network. In March, I coordinated a "Bag O' Fun" campaign, an idea that came from my 9-year-old Deaf son. He wanted to give other deaf children an opportunity to play sports. He and his peers assembled bags filled with balls and other playground gear for deaf children in Puerto Rico and Haiti in collaboration with Off the

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Grid Mission and Association de Sourdes de Leveque Haiti (ASLH).

I also enjoy volunteering my time at the local county library doing ASL story times.

Seeing the joy in the kids' faces and creating new memories for them are one of the best gifts one can receive. I often say that there is a true gift in the giving.

### 3.) What is your vision for the future of the deaf and hard of hearing community? Are you optimistic or frustrated, or both with what is generally happening in America?

When I found out my first child was Deaf, I was uncertain about the future of the deaf community and the opportunities would be available for them. "Would deaf children have the same opportunities? Would they have the same wonderful experience I had when growing up?" Those questions were what I asked myself as a tired, new mom holding her newborn. But, over the years, I felt joy and optimism. Deaf Culture is alive and well, and its players are not just big "D" Deaf individuals, but the signing community, parents, allies, interpreters, family members and more. In this world filled with billions of people, there is one common thread that connects us all – and that is the human experience. We are ultimately all humans.

Because technology is advancing rapidly, this increasingly gives deaf individuals equal footing. People can create social media accounts that connect with the masses, without them having to know that you are deaf. They see your content, your interest and ultimately your experience.



I remember when my father first started serving as an attorney with Department of Justice, people communicated in person or over the phone. That made it difficult for hearing non-signers to see the true competency of deaf individuals. During my time in high school, e-mails did not exist. Instead, notes were exchanged via snail mail. Fast forward to today, my kids have access to social media and can text and SnapChat with their peers, deaf or hearing.

In short, I envision that the deaf and hard of hearing community will continue to grow as a vibrant presence, rich in intersectionality and stronger ties through the world through globalization and technology. More deaf and hard of hearing individuals will need to climb the ranks and contribute in every profession possible and be change agents.

With commitment to media, information access and telecommunications for all, any and every deaf person would be able pursue any dream and have an equal opportunity to excel and thrive in the pursuit.

### 4.) How best can TDI can serve yours and others' needs and issues in telecommunications, media, and information services in the near

**future? Are there some areas you feel we should work on, that we haven't had in the recent past? Are you aware of our work with the FCC for areas like emergency communication, relay services, captioning on TV and the Internet, broadband access, and etc.?**

This is where TDI is instrumental. More than ever, technology innovators need to make sure that new technology is accessible to everyone. Accessible technology should not be an afterthought. It should be a part of the initial planning, and TDI should serve as a key liaison and collaborator with major technology institutions like Google, Amazon, Apple and more, bridging the needs of a vibrant customer base (our community) and the inventors.

The next big thing would be Virtual Reality, and I can see this being deeply entrenched in our lives. As this evolves, we need to make sure this is accessible. The other layer would be to figure out how to incorporate some of the audio-based technologies like Siri and Echo and make them more accessible. And naturally, there is always the issue of making 911 and emergency readiness accessible to all deaf and hard of hearing consumers.



# Sean Markel

## Deaf Activist

### 1.) Briefly introduce yourself. Were you born deaf/hard of hearing or did this occur in later life? Did you have a deaf family or a hearing family?

I was born Deaf, and I am in the third Deaf generation on my father's side. My Deaf grandparents owned a farm in York, PA.

I grew up in a small Main Street town in Sykesville, Maryland for 18 years and also lived on the campus of the Maryland School of the Deaf (MSD) in Frederick for 12 years. My father placed our Sykesville home in the central area between Frederick and Baltimore and worked as a professional carpenter and a freelance in the states of Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and the District of Columbia. I was sent to MSD and stayed overnight from Sunday nights to Fridays.

I have four Deaf brothers and two Deaf parents—my father passed away at 91 and my mother of 90 years lives near me. My beautiful wife, Amy, Deaf herself, and I have two beautiful hearing daughters. I felt so inspired when my daughters both learned ASL during their infancy, and all of us continue to have a very strong bond today.

The Markels and my mother's

other families have a mixed family. My mother's side has more than 45 Deaf relatives across the U.S. Eastern areas and a few family members in Texas. Almost all hearing relatives are ASL interpreters or users.

I grew up at the MSD from Kindergarten to 9th grade and moved to the Model Secondary for the Deaf (MSSD) to better meet my needs. During this time, almost all MSD teachers were hearing. I did not have an opportunity to learn how to translate my ASL into English writing and reading.

Later, I was recruited by the Football Coach at MSSD. I felt this was the right time and transferred there. A year later, my wife followed to MSSD. Both of us happily acquired access to ASL in the classes and ASL users/teachers in classes at MSSD. We learned a lot and compared ASL and English in school classes and drama classes. At this time, Frank Turk and Dr. Robert Davila were working and visiting us often.

I am happy my old school, MSD, has hired many deaf teachers helping deaf children thrive, expanded enrichment programs and high sports competition,

and ensures it is a safe place for deaf children. Today, the school has educational excellence and provides a healthy learning environment for deaf students.

My wife and I ask all of you to protect the current and future deaf children and keep them away from vulnerabilities such as language deprivation and abuse.

My wife and I together completed a quarter of courses at National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), and then I followed in my wife's footsteps in returning to DC. I worked full time to save for college and supported my wife to study at Gallaudet University. During her time at Gallaudet University, my wife faced barriers, had no access to ASL in some classes. After she received job promotions, we could afford to leave my federal job after 9 years with the US Postal Service. I got a DeafBlind interpreter/para-teacher job at the Maryland School for the Blind. I enjoyed serving DeafBlind students for almost a year before returning to school.

I then completed most of the undergraduate courses at Gallaudet University and received

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## MARKEL Continued from page 14

an Honor of Society Certificate, resulting from my tremendous mentoring and tutoring from my wife and also from Dr. Jay Innes. Later, I transferred my credits to Excelsior College in New York and completed undergraduate work. I received a Bachelor of Science's degree there, my studies having a majority of Communication Arts and Deaf/Special Education courses.

After graduation, I stayed at home with my daughters. Owning several properties, I became a longtime landlord and freelanced to do a variety of work such as ASL Entertainment Interpreter and Negotiator. Being home is an important investment in our family, which is a win-win situation.

A few years ago, I worked for a friend's small company doing water-well drilling and septic cleaning. I realigned a heavy water drilling machine and truck, prepared water well drilling statistical reports, and had a truck driving license (Class C commercial motor vehicle weighing up 26,000 pounds).

**2.) What have you done for the deaf and hard of hearing community? Which organizations are you heavily involved with, and why you enjoy doing things with these groups?**

I became the Vice President for the Maryland Association for the Deaf (MDAD) and stayed very active for eight years. I enjoyed working with the then President, Astrid Goodstein, and the many MDAD members who were a lot of fun to work with. I remembered we worked with Maryland's state office to resolve issues, e.g., prison accessibility and highway signs



Sean Markel with U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen, D-MD at the March 8, 2018 National Deaf Grassroots Rally

showing the availability of TTYs in the rest areas. I volunteered as a Disability Access Task Force member at the Baltimore Ravens Stadium (See MDAD's Official Publication Volume #38, No. 3, Fall 1998) and worked with Ravens ownership to ensure equal access of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing for five years. When the Ravens' milestone was complete, I received a congratulatory letter from the State of Maryland.

I conducted deaf interpreting for interviews between coaches and football players, and I was on one half of the video screen, and the coaches and players were on the other half. Also I voluntarily followed up on accessibility changes when the Ravens owner sold the team. The new owner plans to add a video board. Today, I continue to maintain regular contact with the team ownership.

For four years, I and others negotiated with the University of Maryland-College Park (UMD), Xfinity Center, and Capital One Field at Maryland Stadium on the campus of UMD to ensure all screens, including on their websites, had closed captioning. In 2016-2017, this university agreed to expand accessibility across their

video content.

I am currently serving as a Deaf Grassroots Movement (DGM) representative for Maryland. My DGM-Maryland team and I called on Deaf and Hard of Hearing citizens for a rally at the Maryland Capitol in Annapolis on May 2016. I met with Delegate Gail Bates for an hour, spoke briefly with Maryland Governor Larry Hogan, Maryland Legislators, and a County Executive. DGM-Maryland's team will return to work with deaf organizations in Maryland as well as state legislators. Last year, a bill was proposed to require the Motor Vehicle Administration to provide Hard of Hearing and Deaf Drivers' vehicle tags showing the driver cannot hear. Again visiting the Capitol to share our voice, we stated our opposition to the bill. As agreed among involved parties, a task force will be formed to review driver issues and make recommendations.

Last year, the Governor's Office of Maryland for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) hosted the Legislation Awareness Day event, providing highlights about the legislation process. Also annual

**MARKEL Continued from page 15**

awards were announced. In 2017 at this event, I received an award from the Governor of Maryland, Larry Hogan, and this award recognized my longtime influence and community service for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. I highly recommend Maryland deaf citizens to attend any future events sponsored by ODHH.

I chaired the National DGM rally on March 8, 2018, marching from Gallaudet University to the U.S. Capitol. The rally had a special emphasis on unity amongst organizations. 15 major organizations sent representatives to take part of the joint collaboration. I want to thank each of them and those who joined all together to make this civil rights movement possible, and to focus on the principal purpose of easing barriers to Communication, Education, and Jobs (CEJ) for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.

Currently, I am serving a second term as the President of the Maryland School of the Deaf Alumni Association (MSDAA). The association continues to contribute annual scholarship

funds for the MSD students and additional funds for MSD events. The MSD community will celebrate its 150th anniversary in June 2018.

**3.) What is your vision for the future of the deaf and hard of hearing community? Are you optimistic or frustrated, or both with what is generally happening in America?**

We have been asleep, and many organizations are still asleep. Dangerous bills were proposed such as H.R. 620 which could weaken the ADA. We need to stay awake, work hard, and work smarter. We need to tell our stories across America.

You and I have many needs and by working together and helping Deaf and HoH Americans, we can improve Communication, Education and Jobs (CEJ). Freedom takes work. Unity continues to grow, and our voices are being heard. We need to share the same mission, and share it with others. With your organization's help, we will be no longer disadvantaged citizens in America.

We can continue to work together to make our America love, respect and welcome our community in this public and professional world.

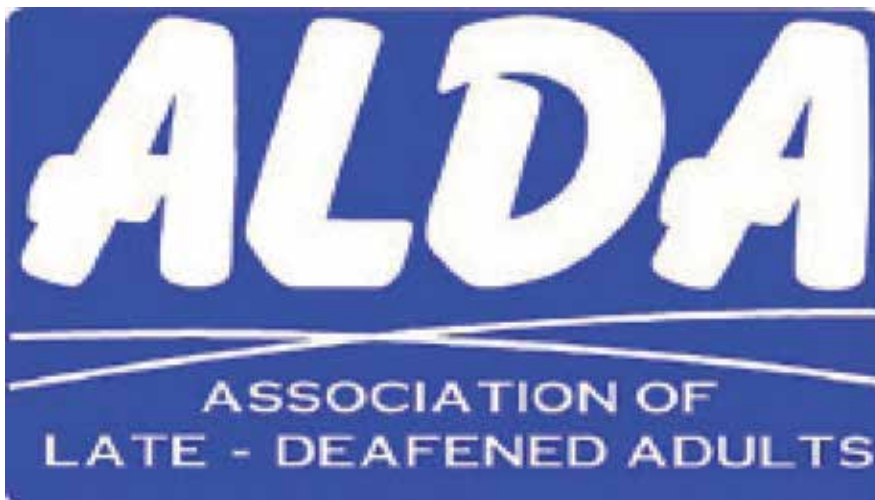
DGM encourages all Deaf and Hard of Hearing Americans to evaluate their needs, voice their rights through non-violence and non-threatening actions. We must appreciate and celebrate our culture. We cannot ignore especially the Deaf and Hard of Hearing citizens who are in prisons, hospitals, treatment centers, nurse homes, schools, homes of hearing families, universities, and in the workforce. We need to acquire equal human rights, access, love, and respect.

**4.) How best can TDI can serve yours and others' needs and issues in telecommunications, media, and information services in the near future. Are you aware of our work with the FCC for areas like emergency communication, relay services, captioning on TV and the Internet, broad?**

First of all, I congratulate TDI for its hard work over 50 years. DGM is aware of TDI's work with the FCC, filing hundreds of times. There are opportunities to include major issues other than issues discussed in the recent TDI action plan. I recommend that TDI listen to and document key takeaways from DGM's spokesperson.

I recommend that TDI uses its strength to conduct one-on-one meetings with the Deaf agencies and organizations to learn what works to plan for CEJ's increased outcomes. Secondly, I recommend that TDI submit an annual performance report that reflects baselines, performance measures, challenges, and status of corrective actions.

I thank you for all of your questions, it has helped me think through and realize how much DGM needs to do.





# TDI In Action

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AADB = American Association of the Deaf Blind  
 ALDA = Association of Late Deafened Adults, Inc.  
 ASDC = American Society of Deaf Children  
 CC – closed captioning  
 CCASDHH = California Coalition of Agencies Serving Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Inc.  
 CGB = Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau  
 CPADO = Cerebral Palsy and Deaf Organization  
 CTS – Captioned Telephone Service  
 DHHCAN = Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consumer Advocacy Network  
 DRO = Disability Rights Office  
 E-911 – Enhanced 911  
 FCC = Federal Communications Commission  
 FNPRM – Final Notice of Proposed Rulemaking  
 HLAA = Hearing Loss Association of America

IP – Internet Protocol  
 NAD = National Association of the Deaf  
 NBDA = National Black Deaf Advocates  
 NG-911 – Next Generation 911  
 RERC-TA = Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Telecommunication Access  
 SCAT/SCABT = Speech Communications Assistance By Telephone, Inc.  
 SoA = Speed of Answer  
 TAP = Technology Access Program at Gallaudet University  
 TDM = Time Division Multiplexing, a method of handling electronic communications  
 TIA = Telecommunications Industry Association  
 TLPC = Samuelson-Glushko Technology Law & Policy Clinic  
 TRS – Telecommunications Relay Service  
 VRS – Video Relay Service

## Captioning, Subtitles, and User Interfaces

■ Comments to Accessibility of User Interfaces, and Video Programming Guides and Menus • MB Docket No. 12-108)

(October 30) TDI, NAD, AFB, CPADO, and HLAA urged the Commission to fully retain the December 20, 2018 deadline for mid-sized and smaller MVPDs to comply with user interface accessibility requirements. These comments were filed in response to the Public Notice issued on September 28, 2017. In its 2013 User Accessible Interface Order implementing the CVAA, the Commission said that it was “cognizant of Congress’s desire that consumers with disabilities gain access to video programming without undue delay.” Extending the deadline would be contrary to this Congressional intent and would only delay the ability of individuals with disabilities to

experience the important educational, social, and cultural opportunities that video programming services provide. In fact, the Commission already affirmed that this deadline was sufficient in its Second Order “declin[ing] to provide additional time for deadline, those MVPDs will have had five years to comply with video accessibility requirements. Ensuring that individuals with disabilities have access to video programming greatly outweighs any remaining challenges that may remain for mid-sized and smaller MVPDs to meet the December 20, 2018 compliance deadline.

<https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/1030723525996/12-108%20Comment%20of%20Consumer%20Groups.pdf>

## Telecommunications Relay Services

■ Comments to Petition for Reconsideration from Rolka Loube Associates on behalf of the Interstate

TRS Advisory Council, Structure and Practice of the Video Relay Service Program, Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities

(November 9) TDI, NAD, CPADO, ALDA, and Bryen Yunashko – Deaf Blind Consumer Advocate, submitted these comments in response to the Petition for Reconsideration filed by Rolka Loube Associates LLC, on behalf of the Interstate TRS Advisory Council concerning the Federal Communications Commission’s Report and Order and Order released July 6, 2017. Consumer Groups supported TRS Advisory Council’s calls to provide additional compensation to TRS providers for a trial of skills-based routing and to commence the trial “as quickly as possible.” Consumer Groups urged the Commission to set the deadline for commencement not later than three months following the Commission’s





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order granting the Petition. The Commission's VRS Order stated that without knowing the extent of any additional costs associated with participation in the trial, "any added costs incurred to provide skills-based routing during the trial period will not be billable to the TRS Fund." As the TRS Advisory Council noted, "not one provider indicated their willingness to participate in the [skills-based routing] trial." The lack of funding for the skills-based routing trial combined with the fact that the VRS compensation rates for the 2017 fiscal year had not been released by the June 1, 2017 trial participation notice deadline resulted in the unfortunate consequence of no providers participating in this crucial trial. Skills-based routing in VRS would allow consumers to attain more effective communication and would be more aligned with community interpreting standards and codes of conduct. The compensation proposal set forth in the Petition, compensating all providers at the emergent rate of \$5.29 per skills-based conversation minute, segregated from regular conversation minutes, for the duration of the trial is reasonable. The provider cost data collected during the skills-based routing trial could inform the Commission's decision regarding a more permanent compensation structure following completion of the trial.

<https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/110973527550/Consumer%20Groups%20Comments%20on%20Advisory%20Council%20Petition%20for%20Reconsideration.pdf>

## Emergency Communication

■ Letter and Documentation to US Government Accountability Office re: Implementation Issues with Next Generation 911

(September 1) TDI, NAD, HLAA, Chicagoland DeafBlind Alliance, CPADO, RERC on Technology for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Accessibility Committee with NENA, Omnitor, DSA, NASADHH, and CCASDHH sent a letter with input and documentation to Ms. Jean L. Cook, Senior Analyst, U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) for its study on Next Generation 911 (NG911) implementation issues. GAO conducted this review, based on instructions from the U.S. Congress, to describe, to the extent possible, the status of NG911 implementation nationwide, successes and challenges faced by state and local entities in NG911 implementation, and federal agency efforts to assist implementation. GAO sought to obtain some perspective from individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing on federal actions to help implement NG911, including actions to ensure these systems are accessible, and any areas in which the federal government has succeeded or could do more. Also, it asked for a list of reports, studies, or policy papers that would address topics/issues with NG911 that would meet the needs of individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing.

## Hearing Aid-Compatible Mobile Handsets

■ Ex parte to Revisions to Reporting Requirements Governing Hearing Aid-Compatible Mobile Handsets WT

Docket No. 17-228

(October 30) HLAA, DHH Tech RERC at Gallaudet, and TDI met with Kevin Holmes, Acting Legal Advisor for Wireless and Public Safety for Commissioner Carr. Also on that day, HLAA, Gallaudet, and TDI met with Rachel Bender, Wireless and International Advisor for Chairman Pai, and Louis Peraertz, Senior Legal Advisor, Wireless, International, and Public Safety for Commissioner Clyburn. Consumer organization representatives are convinced (that) the best way to get information to consumers about HAC handsets available by providers and to understand whether hearing aid compatibility (HAC) requirements are being met by Service Providers, including Non-Tier I Service Providers, is through the current system that requires all Service Providers to file annual HAC reports directly with the Commission. Consumer representatives were concerned that other than these annual reports filed with the Commission, there are few ways to get accurate and complete information from Non-Tier I Service Providers about HAC offerings. When we reviewed the websites of several Non-Tier I Service Providers, consumer representatives found these websites were often not easy to navigate and sometimes contained misleading information about their HAC inventory in contrast to the reports filed with the Commission. We noted that in-store testing by consumers has historically been hit or miss and that depending on consumer complaints to determine compliance would not yield a full or accurate picture of compliance. However, Consumer Groups understand that some non-

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Tier I Service Providers have expressed concerns about the burden of filing these reports. Consumer Groups suggested that we sit down with both Tier I and non-Tier I Service Providers and the Commission to find ways to streamline these reports. Our goal is to ensure consumers have access to essential information, while at the same time easing any unnecessary reporting burden that Service Providers experience in fulfilling this requirement.

[https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/1101001256246/HLAA%20ex%20parte%20filing%20\(final\)%2011\\_1\\_2017.pdf](https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/1101001256246/HLAA%20ex%20parte%20filing%20(final)%2011_1_2017.pdf)

■ Reply Comments to Revisions to Reporting Requirements Governing Hearing Aid-Compatible Mobile Handsets, WT Dockets No. 17-228 and 17-123

(November 27) HLAA, TDI, DHHCAN, NAD, and Gallaudet RERC submitted reply comments in response to comments filed regarding the proposed revisions to Reporting Requirements Governing Hearing Aid-Compatible Mobile Handsets issued by the Federal Communications Commission. In our filed Comments, Consumer Groups and the Gallaudet RERC indicated that we find the current reporting requirements for Non-Tier I Service Providers to be both useful and necessary. We also indicated that we would not be opposed to working with the Commission and industry to modify existing requirements to streamline the filings for Service Providers. Then as now, it was clear that until we reach the time the Commission requires all handsets to be hearing aid compatible, there is a need to

ensure that benchmarks are reached continually and consistently. In fact, without the involvement of the Commission at each incremental step of the way, Consumer Groups and the Gallaudet RERC are not convinced that the progress we have seen to date on HAC phones would have happened at all. Consumer Groups and the Gallaudet RERC noted that AT&T, a Tier I service provider, filed comments in this proceeding suggesting ways to streamline the burden of filing Form 655. As we stated in our Comments, Consumer Groups and the Gallaudet RERC are not opposed to finding ways to streamline Form 655. As long as Service Provider websites are not accurate, complete or up to date, these reports are the one way, the only way, accurate information is made available to both consumers and the Commission. A certification is simply no substitute for the information required until such time that the Commission requires 100% of handsets to be HAC. In fact, the Commission's website is a good source of information that provides a direct link to the Reports generated by Form 655. CTIA's website does lead to the GARI site, which we discussed in our Comments is another good source of information about handsets. However, it does nothing to help someone living in a rural area learn what is being provided at the local level by their own Service Provider. The Commission has not yet required Non-Tier I Service Providers to ensure that all handsets are HAC. The Commission does require Non-Tier I Service Providers websites to include information about HAC phones. (Thus), we know that not all Non-Tier I Service Providers have accurate, complete and up to date information about HAC phones on their websites. Some contain no information at all. If so simple a

requirement has not been met, how can we be sure that benchmarks will be met if there is no reporting requirement to the Commission? We urged the Commission to find a way to make Form 655 less burdensome to Service Providers and still provide needed information about HAC handsets.

[https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/11272464527623/Consumer%20Groups%20Reply%20Comments%20HAC%20NPRM%20\(final\)%2011\\_27\\_2017.pdf](https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/11272464527623/Consumer%20Groups%20Reply%20Comments%20HAC%20NPRM%20(final)%2011_27_2017.pdf)

## Other Issues

■ Comments to Inquiry Concerning Deployment of Advanced Telecommunications Capability to All Americans In A Reasonable and Timely Fashion (GN Docket No. 17-199)

(September 21) TDI, NAD, DHHCAN, CPADO, CSD, and HLAA submitted these comments in accordance with the Commission's Notice of Inquiry under Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. In today's world, that requires users of Internet-based TRS services to have access to broadband. The statute requires the Commission to measure the deployment of broadband to all Americans. In these comments, the Consumer Groups identify (1) what functionally equivalent access for the deaf and hard of hearing community means, (2) what components of that (e.g., latency, sustained capacity, data caps) are missing from the Commission's measurement strategy and (3) recommendations to ensure that the Commission's measurement of broadband availability takes into consideration deaf, hard-of-hearing,

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late-deafened, DeafBlind, speech disabled, and deaf and mobile-disabled Americans. Deployment of and accessibility to broadband for these consumers is fundamental to the mandate of the Americans with Disabilities Act that such individuals have nationwide access to the telephone system and network “in a manner that is functionally equivalent to the ability of an individual who does not have a hearing or speech impairment to communicate using voice communications services by wire or radio.” Broadband is vital for video relay services (“VRS”), which has become the preferred method of relay services for the large percentage of those who are deaf that commonly use sign language, and hearing consumers that communicate with them. Equally important, another large percentage of hard-of-hearing and late-deafened consumers who do not use sign language, can speak well enough to be understood and (1) use captioned telephone relay services or (2) use video conferencing services for lip reading. A significant percentage of Americans with disabilities are low income, and many deaf, hard-of-hearing, late-deafened, DeafBlind and mobile-disabled consumers live at, or below, the poverty level. As a result, many of these consumers rely on and participate in federal programs that make access to their communications services affordable. To the extent broadband is not affordable to such consumers, it is also not available. For these reasons, the Consumer Groups applauded the Commission’s continued efforts to ensure that broadband is deployed and available to all Americans and provide these Comments to support

those efforts. Broadband speed and performance thresholds are important factors in enabling VRS calls in real-time. Likewise, appropriate broadband speeds and performance thresholds are needed to enable Internet-based captioned telephone services, captioned telephones that can be used with VoIP services, and video conferencing. Latency, throttling, and other factors, impact the bare minimum download/upload speed required to achieve and ensure functionally equivalent and effective communication via video technologies. Other factors, such as multiple, simultaneous users of video communication at one location, also affect the minimum broadband needed. In these comments, the Consumer Groups first defined the minimum broadband characteristics necessary to ensure that broadband is sufficient to support the communications needs of deaf, hard-of-hearing, late-deafened, DeafBlind, speech-disabled, or deaf and mobile disabled. The Consumer Groups next explained what measures the Commission should adopt to determine whether broadband is available to these Americans.

[https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/10921469416286/FINAL\\_TDI%20and%20Consumer%20Groups%20Comments%20on%20Section%20706%20NOI.pdf](https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/10921469416286/FINAL_TDI%20and%20Consumer%20Groups%20Comments%20on%20Section%20706%20NOI.pdf)

■ Comments to Amendment of Procedural Rules Governing Formal Complaint Proceeding Delegated to the EB (MB Docket No. 17-245)

(October 26) TDI, AFB, CPADO, CSD, HLAA, NAD, and IT-RERC, Univ. of MD submitted these comments in response to the proposed amendments to the formal complaint procedures at the Federal Communications

Commission. Consumer Groups and RERC support the Commission’s effort to establish uniform rules and procedures for formal complaints, including those filed under Sections 255, 716, and 718. Formal complaints, along with requests for dispute assistance and informal complaints, help people with disabilities gain access to telecommunications. Many claims are adjudicated through the less costly, less labor-intensive dispute assistance and informal complaint processes. However, when formal complaints become necessary, it is vital these procedures are not too burdensome on complainants. Consumer Groups and RERC support the Commission’s decision to expand the reply period from 3 to 10 days. Consumer Groups and RERC do not oppose the Commission’s decision to raise the answer period from 20 to 30 days. Consumer Groups and RERC support the Commission’s decision to repeal the requirement that parties obtain Commission approval to serve interrogatories. Currently, complainants and defendants can serve up to 10 written interrogatories and complainants can serve up to 5 interrogatories on reply, but only after obtaining approval from the Commission at each stage. Under (a) proposed rule, the same 10-10-5 framework would remain; however, the parties no longer need to obtain Commission approval before serving the interrogatories. Interrogatories are a useful tool to quickly get to the heart of the matter in the complaint. Lowering the procedural burden for interrogatories will make the formal complaint process easier and faster. Consumer Groups and RERC are pleased that the proposed



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modification maintains the language from the existing rule stating that “This procedure may not be employed for the purpose of delay, harassment or obtaining information that is beyond the scope of permissible inquiry related to the material facts in dispute in the pending proceeding.” Many complainants have limited resources and may be less able to cope with the burden of excess or superfluous interrogatories. Consumer Groups and RERC agree with the Commission’s proposal to remove the requirement that parties include proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law in complaints, answers, and replies. Consumer Groups and RERC support the Commission’s conclusion that requiring participation from executives in meetings are essential for timely and successful mediation. This is of particular importance for groups who may have limited resources to continue negotiations if executives are not involved in the process early on and further negotiations are necessary. Further, Consumer Groups and RERC welcome the Market Dispute Resolution Division’s assistance with mediation, as mediation is usually the fastest and cheapest way for all the parties involved to get relief. Consumer Groups and RERC wholeheartedly support the Commission’s proposal to extend the shot clock provisions of Section 208 to Disability Access Complaints. Consumer Groups and RERC request that the Commission create and maintain outreach and educational materials designed to educate the public about their rights within the complaint framework. This will help the public know what procedures they

should follow, including whether they should submit a formal or informal complaint or a request for dispute resolution. The Commission should utilize several means to publicize these materials, including producing videos in American Sign Language with captions and voice-overs for individuals with disabilities.

<https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/1026232321310/17-245%20Comment%20of%20Consumer%20Group%20%26%20RERC.pdf>

■ Reply Comments to Amendment of Procedural Rules Governing Formal Complaint Proceeding Delegated to the EB (MB Docket No. 17-245)

(November 13) TDI, AFB, CPADO, CCASDHH, HLAA, NAD, RERC on Universal Interface & Information Technology Access, and RERC on Technology for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing submitted these reply comments in response to comments filed with the Federal Communications Commission. We addressed certain proposals, primarily regarding Section 208 and pole attachment complaints that, if adopted and applied to disability access complaints, would increase the burden on complainants and delay resolution of the underlying dispute. (We felt that) the proposed rules balance the interests of fairness and timely resolution to achieve a just result for both parties.

- Discovery, Information Designations, and Use of Information Obtained via Discovery – The discovery process does not need to be expanded or extended because pre-filing settlement discussions and information designations help parties learn the most important issues in the dispute and target their discovery requests to the

information that is relevant to those issues. Nor should the Commission allow parties to delay filing answers and replies until after all discovery requests are fulfilled. Thus, all parties will be able to adequately develop their arguments under the proposed discovery process.

- Answers – The 30-day deadline for answers is reasonable by itself, but any burden on defendant’s will be further reduced by the Commission’s proposal to remove requirements that complaints, answers, and replies include findings of fact, conclusions of law, and legal analysis. If that is still not enough, parties can seek an extension. Thus, the Commission should not extend the deadline for answers.

- Shot Clocks – Consumer Groups & RERCs reasserted their support for applying shot clocks to all three types of formal complaints. The Commission should not adopt commenter suggestions that would only serve to undermine the timely resolution of complaints that shot clocks are designed to achieve. We agree with Verizon that starting the shot clock when the complaint is filed will provide parties with plenty of time to submit legal analyses and material facts and that the shot clock should only be paused sparingly, when there are unforeseen circumstances. Consumer Groups & RERCs also do not think it is necessary to set the shot clock beyond 5 months (150 days) after a complaint is filed. In accordance with the Commission’s goal to



## TDI In Action

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have consistent formal complaint rules and to ensure formal complaints are timely resolved, the Commission should apply the 5-month shot clock from when a complaint is filed to all three types of formal complaint proceedings.

In any case, the commenters' proposals would have a disproportionate and unfair impact on those who are least able to protect their interests. That is because, unlike most companies, consumers and consumer groups do not have the ability to manage a

resource-intensive and protracted formal complaint process. Such a process might deter these parties from bringing a formal complaint even when they have a cognizable harm. Even if they do file a formal complaint, a lengthier process means that consumers would unnecessarily sustain the harm the dispute is designed to address for a longer amount of time. Consistent with the desire for timely and affordable resolution of formal complaints, Consumer Groups and RERCs agree with the Electric Utilities that the Commission should adopt a proposed rule, which would allow for more

opportunities for resolution through mediation. Mediation is usually the fastest and cheapest way to resolve a complaint for both parties. Thus, by allowing for mediation to take place at any time during a proceeding, the parties can quickly and efficiently resolve disputes when it becomes apparent that the remainder of the formal complaint process is unnecessary.

<https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/11132824318063/17-245%20Reply%20Comments%20of%20Consumer%20Group%20%26%20RERC.pdf>



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\*Available to qualified applicants



# Stamp Honoring the Colombia Relay Service Program



Kenneth Rothschild



Anna Bitencourt

*Editor's Note: thanks to Kenneth Rothschild, a former TDI Board member from 1995*

*to 1999, here is the article about the Colombia postal services agency issuing a stamp to cover*

*Colombia's national relay service program. Mr. Rothschild is a renowned expert on world-wide postage stamps featuring deaf and hard of hearing people/events. Thanks also to Anna Bitencourt for her help in translating the article from its Spanish language version to our English version. Colombia is a country that is in the northwest part of South America.*



service is ideal for public and private entities to serve deaf people in their customer service offices.

SIEL is available from Monday to Friday, except holidays, from 7:00am to 7:30pm, and Saturdays from 8:30am to 1:00pm. It is free and with a duration of up to 30 minutes.

## Virtual Interpreter Training

The ITC Ministry together with FENASCOL are aware that LSC interpreters are the main link in communications between deaf and hearing people. To guarantee quality service, the Relay Center trains the interpreters who are already part of the project in topics such as: sign language interpretation, communications, deaf culture, and customer service.

## ITC Appropriation Tools

Offers contents for learning, compression, knowledge-building and, in particular, motivates deaf people to use ITCs, enabling them to become generators of information and take advantage of the available tools to facilitate access to communications in the digital environment.

## Mobile App

Via cell phones or tablets with Android or iOS technology, deaf people can make relay calls or use the SIEL and PQRS services, and an interpreter will be available virtually. Deaf people can communicate from anywhere and receive calls from hearing people. The Mobile App is available for download as Relay Live Connect Center (Android) and Live Chat Relay Center (iOS).

*The investigation, information and opinions expressed herein are the sole responsibility of their authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Ministry of Information Technology and Communications, nor of National Postal Services, Inc.*



## Relay Center Postal Issue

Every day advances in science and technology show us that communication barriers between deaf and hearing people no longer exist, allowing for fluid and effective two-way communications.

For the National Postal Services Inc., 4-72, it is significant to be able to take part in the launch of the Relay Center, through the issue of a stamp dedicated to the development and progress of communication technologies serving the deaf people of Colombia.

4-72 has an indisputable interest in supporting and generating spaces that actively include the participation of people with hearing disabilities. What is also indisputable, is the importance of support from government entities in developing programs that improve the quality of life of deaf people. With this, we are strengthening the principles of equality and equity for all citizens.

For this postal issue, forty-eight thousand stamps will be issued, laden with sentiment, and graphically expressing the sign for "connection" to give an account of the objective of the project, which is to allow deaf people to communicate with hearing people and vice versa. The design team was led by Diego Agudelo Bohórquez, graphic designer, who is also an employee of the Relay Center, rendering him an expert in the subject.

For 4-72, it is a source of pride that the letters and packages sent by Colombians through our network carry a positive message, full of hope and optimism, to their destinations.

Adriana María Barragán López

President

National Postal Services, Inc., 4-72.

Bogotá, D.C., Saturday, December 3, 2016

## Introducing the Colombia Relay Service

The Relay Center is a project of the Ministry of Information Technology and Communications (MinTIC) in partnership with the National Federation of the Deaf in Colombia (FENASCOL) which has been, for the past 15 years, removing barriers of face-to-face and telephonic communications between deaf and hearing people through virtual interpreters of Colombian Sign Language (LSC). This service can be accessed for free by visiting [www.centroderelievo.gov.co](http://www.centroderelievo.gov.co).

## Relay Calls

This is a telephone communication service that can be accessed by deaf people and hearing people who want to communicate with each other. Finding yourselves in different locations is no longer a limitation. This service can be accessed by visiting the website or dialing the national toll-free line 018000123181. You can make your calls to any destination in Colombia to a landline or cellular number, from Sunday to Sunday (including holidays) from 6:30am to 12:00pm. The duration of the call varies according to the communication range and there is no call limit per person.

## Online Interpreting Service (SIEL)

With the Online Interpreting Service (SIEL) it is no longer necessary to know Colombian Sign Language to communicate with a deaf individual. Through a tablet, a computer, or a cell phone with internet connection and an amplification system of audio and microphone, we connect you with virtual interpreters who serve as communication channels in real time and in person. This

*Come one, come all  
to the Gala!*

January 15, 2018

Greetings to TDI Members and Friends in Industry and Government,

*Happy New Year !!!*

We are pleased to announce that this year in 2018, TDI will be celebrating its 50 years of accomplishments in consumer advocacy for Americans who are deaf and hard of hearing (also some of us who are deaf blind or are deaf and have a mobile disability).

To commemorate our 50th historical milestone, we are now making initial plans to host the Gala. It will be on Thursday evening, October 25, 2018 at the Bethesda North Marriott Hotel and Conference Center in Bethesda, Maryland. This will take place just before Gallaudet has its annual Homecoming weekend on October 27-29, 2018.

In a few weeks, we will announce some other details on the Gala. We will strive to keep the admission fee to the Gala as affordable for everyone. And we will also share links on how to purchase admission tickets for the Gala and how to register for a stay at the Bethesda North Marriott Hotel.

Mark October 25 **RED** on your 2018 calendar!

Sincerely,

John Kinstler

Chair, TDI's 50th Anniversary Gala Celebration Planning Committee



October 25, 2018

Bethesda North Marriott Hotel, North Bethesda, Maryland  
To purchase tickets to Gala, go to [www.tdiforaccess/gala](http://www.tdiforaccess/gala)



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