

Telecommunications - Title IV

Title IV of the Americans with Disabilities Act requires telephone companies to provide continued voice transmission relay services that allow people with hearing and speech impairments to communicate over the telephone through teletypewriter. In addition, Title IV requires that federally funded television public service messages be close captioned for viewers with hearing impairments.

Telecommunications Relay Services, or TRS, enables telephone conversations between people with and without hearing or speech disabilities. TRS relies on communications assistants (CAs) to relay the content of calls between users of text telephones (TTYs) and users of traditional handsets (voice users). For example, a TTY user may telephone a voice user by calling a TRS provider (or "relay center"), where a CA will place the call to the voice user and relay the conversation by transcribing spoken content for the TTY user and reading text aloud for the voice user. This service must be "functionally equivalent" to standard telephone services. Interstate and intrastate relay services are available in all 50 states and the District of Columbia 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

There are two additional federal laws which govern accessible communications – Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Telecommunications Act of 1996. Section 508 requires federal agencies to follow the electronic access standards drafted by the U.S. Access Board to the purchase of accessible electronic and information technology, computers and other equipment, and to make sure Web sites are accessible. Section 255 of the Telecommunications Act requires manufacturers of telecommunications equipment and providers of telecommunications services to ensure their equipment and services are accessible to persons with disabilities, if readily achievable. Section 305 of this Act requires video programming distributors, including multichannel video programming providers such as cable operators, to make video programming accessible for individuals with hearing impairments through the use of closed captioning.

Senate Bill 476, passed by the 2001 West Virginia Legislature, established similar guidelines for state entities as is found in Section 508 §18-10N-1, §18-10N-2, §18-10N-3, §18-10N-4.

More information about Title IV can be found at <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro/trs.html>.