

Magalie Roman Salas
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street, S.W., TW-A325
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Ms. Salas:

RE: COMMENTS ON NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING
IN THE MATTER OF VIDEO DESCRIPTION OF VIDEO PROGRAMMING
MM Docket No. 99-339

I welcome the opportunity to comment on the above-titled Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) which proposes to mandate use of audio description of visual images by television networks and stations using the Secondary Audio Programming (SAP) channel. I support continued development of audio description; HOWEVER, THIS SHOULD ONLY BE DONE ON a voluntary basis. I OPPOSE MAKING VIDEO DESCRIPTION MANDATORY AS THERE ARE OTHER MORE IMPORTANT INFORMATION ITEMS NEEDED. Video description is like dessert, and I'd rather have the main course. For example, weather emergencies are flashed across the tv screen, and because I am blind, I cannot see it. I purchased a weather radio which I leave on during weather changes to alert me to weather emergencies such as severe storm warnings.

Also, I do not have access to the names of the talking heads on news interview programs, or nightly news for that matter, because they are flashed across the screen. Therefore, I am less informed than my sighted colleagues about a particular candidate or other public official because I do not know who said what. Often, when many persons are talking on a panel, I get so confused as to whom is speaking that I give up and turn the tv off.

Too, 800 numbers and addresses to send for some items are flashed on the tv screen. Because I am blind, I am denied the opportunity to purchase inexpensive cd(s) or to donate to an emergency fund which I would have wanted to do. As I write I recall the urgings for donations for the victims of hurricane Andrew, I got my braille all ready to write down the 800 number, and was disappointed and frustrated because all I got was music. Yes, I called the tv station and the announcer provided the number to me, however, there is no reason why I should have had to go to the extra trouble to get what my neighbors had readily available.

Descriptive video is fine in its proper place. It enhances entertainment. It is not equivalent to open or closed captioning. Captioning is a very different thing as deaf persons truly need to get the words of a broadcast; however, knowing colors of clothes or what the visual image is in a movie—someone walking across the stage, is not as important as the emergency or community-relevant information I currently am denied access to hearing.

Technology does exist to make the screen-flashed words audible, please make this the priority instead of descriptive video. The media will not see that we get access to these important messages unless it is mandated by your agency.

Sincerely,

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