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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 am a blind person who uses radio and television for news and occasionally for entertainment. I am concerned about the proposed regulations regarding video description and am mostly puzzled as to why, of all the communication needs of blind people, this merits our attention.

I prefer to get my news through radio rather than television. On the radio, speakers are introduced. Weather information is given in concise, text-based format without references to maps or other visual information. Phone numbers are given in an audible format, often more than once.

It is interesting to note that when TV became popular in the 1950s, radio as a medium of entertainment disappeared, but as a news medium it is still around. Blind people as well as sighted people need to perform other activities while listening to TV or radio.

Audio displaying of textual information is more important than audio description of costumes and set design. When blind and sighted people get together, they discuss television and movies. Rarely is the blind person at any disadvantage in such a discussion because of lack of information. Bart Simpson is just as attractive or unattractive to a blind person as to a sighted person without the visual details.

Text displayed on the screen is usually unavailable to us. I remember sitting in my mother's living room watching TV and hearing a series of beeps indicating storm warnings. I asked my mother, in another room, what was on the screen. By the time she got to the TV, the message was gone. Both of us had missed it, I because I am blind and she because she did not have eyes in the back of her head. Who knows what information we miss when there are no audio cues to remind us to look?

I said earlier that I rely on radio for most of my news. If radio is so useful, why worry about TV? As a person living in the Washington area, I am privileged to be exposed to good local radio. Those living in small towns often have only a local TV station as a local source of news.

According to the proposed regulations, local stations are not required to make anything accessible. This would put many blind people at a disadvantage. Blind people need to be informed about community events to

become active in their communities and be exposed to the people and the information that will make them employable. This local information is often available only on a public access cable channel. These local channels are the worst perpetrators of the silent screen scroll. Blind people who pay taxes and cable bills are not getting full service.

I assume that local stations are omitted from the regulations because they are afraid of cost. Providing text-based information in an audio form will cost much less than providing audio description. Anyone who can read can provide the information; in the worst case, synthetic speech will work. Audio description will require the hiring of consultants to train people, as well as a higher level of reading ability than straight text.

When deciding which information to make available to blind people, all sources of information should be taken into consideration. A blind person can go to a museum to learn about costumes, or read a script to learn about the action in a play. Timely information about text displayed on a TV screen often cannot be had.

Many other information needs are not being met. For example, many cellular phones, VCRs, and televisions use screens displaying inaccessible information and are either totally or partially unusable by blind people. These concerns are more important than what is happening in a sitcom.

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