

FHH Telecom Law
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TRS Over the Internet

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A recent FCC Declaratory Ruling permits the recovery of expenses for the cost of providing Telecommunication Relay Services (TRS) over the Internet. The TRS program presently enables hearing- or speech-impaired persons to connect with TRS Call Centers and, with the assistance of TRS call center staff, communicate with third persons utilizing a teletypewriter/text telephone (TTY) device. But the cost of TTY equipment limits the population who can easily use the service. For persons with access to the Internet, the availability of Internet-based TRS offers a cheap alternative to the purchase of TTY equipment.

The declaratory ruling makes the TTY device unnecessary. TRS users may log onto a website that connects with a TRS Call Center. Once that contact is made, there is little difference between access via a TTY device and a computer. (But the FCC does not explain how a non-impaired person can call an impaired person using Internet-based TRS.)

The FCC noted there are new and different costs associated with making TRS available over the Internet, and held that these costs are eligible for recovery from the Interstate TRS fund. In addition, the FCC sought comment on whether it should attempt to separate Internet TRS services on an intra/inter-state basis.