

**LET'S BRING FTRI* TO 21ST
CENTURY AND IMPROVE
TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE
DEAF, HH, & DB
AND THOSE WITH SPEECH IMPAIRMENTS**

-
- **MODERNIZATION OF TASA LAW** AS SUBMITTED TO 2025 FLORIDA STATE LEGISLATIVE SESSION
 - **TASA LAW** (F.S. 427, SECTIONS 701-708)
 - **ADMINISTRATOR:** FLORIDA TELECOMMUNICATIONS RELAY, INC. * (FTRI)

1

**LET'S BRING FTRI* TO 21ST CENTURY AND IMPROVE
TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEAF, HH, & DB**

What is FTRI?

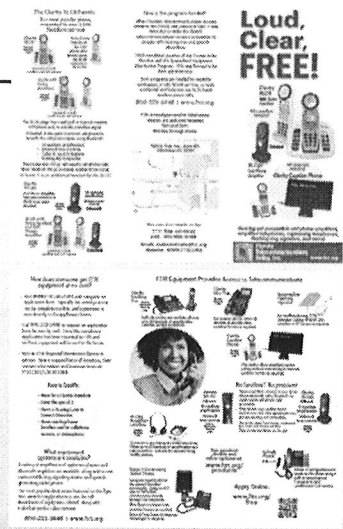
- **FTRI** provides telecommunications equipment to eligible Floridians with hearing loss and those with speech impairments.
- **FTRI** was established in 1992 as a result of **TASA** law which was passed in 1991, in response to Article IV of the **ADA**.
- **FTRI** also works with **Regional Distribution Centers (RDCs)** to distribute telecommunications equipment.

2

LET'S BRING FTRI* TO 21ST CENTURY AND IMPROVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEAF, HH, & DB

Who does FTRI Serve?

- Eligible Florida Citizens who are **Deaf**
- Eligible Florida Citizens who are **Late-Deafened**
- Eligible Florida Citizens who are **Hard of Hearing**
- Eligible Florida Citizens who are **Deafblind**
- Eligible Florida Citizens with **Speech Impairments**



3

LET'S BRING FTRI* TO 21ST CENTURY AND IMPROVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEAF, HH, & DB

Why Now?

- **Florida Relay Service (FRS)** has served 27,000 Users in January 2025
- **Florida Caption Translation Service** ends February 28, 2025
- The number of home **Landlines (analog)** have dropped from 529,745 (2020) to 279,521 (2023) for a fast decline of 53% in 4 years.*
- More people choose **Broadband/Wireless/WiFi/Internet.**
- **Broadband/Wireless/WiFi/Internet** is the future of Telecommunications.

*Report on the Status of Competition in the Telecommunications Industry as of December 31, 2023 (Florida Public Services Commission.

4

LET'S BRING FTRI* TO 21ST CENTURY AND IMPROVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEAF, HH, & DB

What is Happening These Days?

- **Wireless** and **VoIP** are everywhere as we use Tablets & Smartphones
- **Wireless** and **VoIP** are not in the present TASA Law (1991).
- The new "**TASA Modernization**" Bill also adds new definitions for today's technologies that did not happen when the original **TASA Law** was passed in 1991.

5

LET'S BRING FTRI* TO 21ST CENTURY AND IMPROVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEAF, HH, & DB

Past Efforts to Modernize TASA

1991 to 2025 - No Changes have been Made to State Law (34 Years)

In 2012 - Rep. Stephen Wise sponsored HB 272 to update TASA

2021-2024

FTRI pursued iPad Pilot Projects through Public Service Commission

FTRI pursued Federal Broadband Funding through State

PSC finally agreed to work with FTRI to modernize TASA Law

FTRI started to reach out to State Legislators

6

LET'S BRING FTRE* TO 21ST CENTURY AND IMPROVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEAF, HH, & DB

What does Public Service Commission (PSC) Say?

- PSC has recommended that TASA Law be changed to improve telecommunications for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deafblind plus those with speech impairments.
- PSC includes this recommendation in its 2024 & 2023 Commission's Annual Relay Reports – it can be found on [PSC Website](https://www.psc.state.fl.us/): <https://www.psc.state.fl.us/>

<https://www.floridapsc.com/pscfiles/website-files/PDF/Publications/Reports/Telecommunication/TelecommunicationAccess/2024.pdf>

LET'S BRING FTRE* TO 21ST CENTURY AND IMPROVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEAF, HH, & DB

VII. Recommendations

Section 227.04(9), F.S., requires the Commission to include proposals for improvements or changes to the telecommunications access system as part of the Commission's Annual Relay Report. As noted in previous reports, the relay program is facing a number of challenges in terms of changing the funding that allows for the current level of operations and the viability of the program. Long-term funding. The Commission believes that statutory modifications are needed for the program to meet the evolving needs and preferences of consumers served by the program.

Technology and the market have changed significantly since the passage of TASA in 1991. There are currently only 82,600 landline in Florida which is a decrease of 11 million from just the peak 1997 that period, with a subscription in Florida have grown to 24 million and a. Furthermore, VoIP which was not conceived until 1995, currently has 2 million subscribers in Florida. Wireless and VoIP technology occupies the majority of the communications marketplace connecting consumers to the public switched network, yet they are not contemplated in TASA.

TASA provides guidance that specialized telecommunications devices and the relay service should utilize state-of-the-art technologies and encourage the incorporation of new, identified technologies as they are developed.¹⁴ However, as mentioned in Chapter II, those directives include limitations based on how equipment is defined in the statute.¹⁵ Specifically, Section 227.04(13), F.S., defines operational telecommunications devices as equipment that is specifically designed or used to provide basic access to telecommunications services.¹⁶ In addition, "Telecommunications device for the deaf" or "TDD" is defined as "a communication which is conveyed by a visual telephone line and used to transmit or receive signals through telephone lines."¹⁷ Thus, equipment that uses wireless or broadband technologies is not currently supported by TASA. The PSC believes TASA should be revised to authorize FTRE to acquire equipment that uses technologies beyond basic landline telecommunications services.

Currently, the FPSC selects a single company to provide both TRS and CTS statewide, as required by Section 227.04(3)(c), F.S. The Commission selects a vendor through an RFP process for the past eight years, with five companies have submitted bids in response. One of those companies may be exiting the CTS market in the near future, which would result in a single bidder for the service that must be provided by the same company. To ensure against the current rules provide marketplace and ensure a competitive bidding process, the FPSC believes it is necessary to have the ability to select different statewide vendors for TRS and CTS. This may provide a cost savings and open the market to companies that may wish to participate by offering other TRS or CTS, but not both.

Finally, the Commission proposes broadening the eligibility of membership on the TASA Advisory Committee beyond the specific organizations listed within TASA. Not all of the identified organizations are currently active in Florida, while others have not provided a volunteer for the Committee. The goal of the TASA statute would benefit from the flexibility to

VIII. Conclusion

The PSC will continue to be responsive to the needs of the deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, and speech-impaired community in Florida. In addition, FTRE continues to describe equipment and perform research activities that increase consumer access of both FTRE programs and the telecommunications access system.

Since TRS and CTS users are transitioning to IP Relay, VRS, ID CTS, and Wireless Service, by fiscal year 2022-2023, both TRS and CTS minutes are decreasing from the prior fiscal year. Based on continued advancements in technology, along with the expansion of consumer choice, it appears that minutes of use for these services will continue to decline.

Pursuant to Section 227.06(4), F.S., the Commission proposes the following statutory revisions to address changes in technology, consumer preferences, and the present day communications market:

- Authorize for FTRE to acquire equipment that uses other technologies (i.e. wireless and VoIP) beyond land and to provide basic telecommunications service.
- Authorize the Commission to select different statewide vendors for TRS and CTS.
- Broaden the eligibility of membership on the TASA Advisory Committee beyond the specific organizations listed within TASA.



December 2023

¹⁴ Section 227.04(13), F.S. and Section 227.04(14), F.S.
¹⁵ Section 227.04(14), F.S.

approve representatives from other organizations, while maintaining a board that represents the deaf and hard of hearing community.

LET'S BRING FTRI* TO 21ST CENTURY AND IMPROVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEAF, HH, & DB

What will the "Modernization of TASA" do?

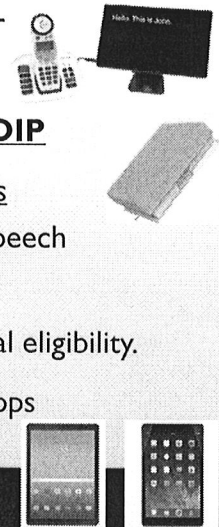
- Allow **FTRI** ("the Administrator") to provide updated and latest telecommunications equipment (wireless).
- Include new definitions for groups in the current **TASA Law** (1991)
- The new **Law** will replace specific names of organizations by allowing anyone who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Deafblind, and other groups to serve on the **TASA Advisory Committee**.

9

LET'S BRING FTRI* TO 21ST CENTURY AND IMPROVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEAF, HH, & DB

How will the "Modernization of TASA" Benefit You?

- FTRI will continue to offer free Phones & Accessories for **Landline/VOIP**
- With new **TASA Modernization Bill**, FTRI will start offering wireless telecommunications. Floridians who are Deaf, HH, DB or those with speech impairments will need to be financially eligible for wireless equipment.
- The **Florida Public Service Commission (PSC)** will decide financial eligibility.
- Wireless devices may include Tablets with Communication and Relay Apps



10

**LET'S BRING FTRI* TO 21ST CENTURY AND IMPROVE
TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEAF, HH, & DB**

Other Key Changes in the TASA Modernization Bill

- Definition changes include an update of **TDD** to include **Text (RTT)**
- **Florida PSC** may reduce monthly phone surcharges and require FTRI to draw funds from its “savings” account for several years
- Then, when FTRI “savings” account is low, **PSC** may set up monthly phone surcharges again

11

**LET'S BRING FTRI* TO 21ST CENTURY AND IMPROVE
TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEAF, HH, & DB**

What is Happening This Year?

- The new TASA Law has been introduced to first of several Legislative Committees (House & Senate) in the **2025 Florida Legislative Session**.
- First introduced to **Senate Committee on Regulated Industries** on Feb. 18, 2025
- The Bill must first pass by Legislative Committees in both houses (Senate & House).
- The Bill Number for TASA Modernization Bill is # **SB 344** for Senate.
- The Bill Number for TASA Modernization Bill is # **HB 435** for House.

12

LET'S BRING FTRI* TO 21ST CENTURY AND IMPROVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEAF, HH, & DB

We Need Your Help!

- Several Legislative Committees will look at two separate (identical) Bills.
- Contact your State Legislator ASAP and ask him/her to support the new TASA Law.
- **Now is the time.** The 2025 Florida Legislative Session is busy through May 1st.
- If passed by both houses and signed by the Governor, the TASA Modernization Law becomes state law on July 1, 2025.
- The next slides will explain how you can contact State Legislator (or his/her legislative aide) to change TASA law.

13

OUR LEGISLATIVE SPONSORS

SENATOR ANA MARIA RODRIGUEZ

DORAL IN MIAMI
REPUBLICAN



HOUSE REPRESENTATIVE ALLISON TANT

TALLAHASSEE
DEMOCRAT



14

LET'S BRING FTREI* TO 21ST CENTURY AND IMPROVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEAF, HH, & DB

How to Contact Your Local State Legislator?

To find Your Florida State Senator, go to **Google Browser**:

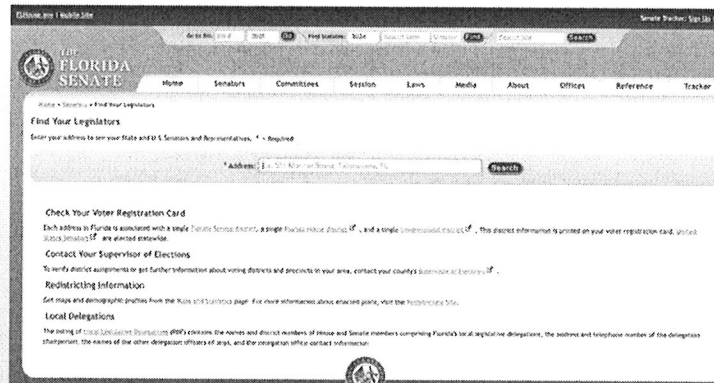
Type: <https://www.flsenate.gov/Senators/Find>

You then type in your home address to see the name of your Florida State Senator

Call your State Senator (or his/her legislative aide) and say, **“Honorable _____.**
Please support SB 344. Thank you.” Then you say your name, and home address before you finish your call.

15

LET'S BRING FTREI* TO 21ST CENTURY AND IMPROVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEAF, HH, & DB



16

LET’S BRING FTTRI* TO 21ST CENTURY AND IMPROVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEAF, HH, & DB

How to Contact Your Local State Legislator?

To find your Florida State Representative, go to **Google Browser:**

You then type your home address and city to see the name(s) of your Florida State Representative(s)

Type: <https://flhouse.gov>

Call your State Representative (House) or his/her legislative aide, and say, “Honorable _____ . Please support HB 435. Thank you. ” Then you say your name and home address before you finish your call.

17

LET’S BRING FTTRI* TO 21ST CENTURY AND IMPROVE TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEAF, HH, & DB



18

**LET'S BRING FTRI* TO 21ST CENTURY AND IMPROVE
TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEAF, HH, & DB**

On Behalf of FTRI, I thank You for Your Support

towards

**Wireless Telecommunications for Floridians who are Deaf,
HH, or DB and those with Speech Impairments**

**Now is the time for FTRI to offer 21st Century
Telecommunications Equipment!**

19

**LET'S BRING FTRI* TO 21ST CENTURY AND IMPROVE
TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEAF, HH, & DB**

FTRI Contact Information

Florida Telecommunications Relay, Inc.

1820 E. Park Avenue, Suite 101

Tallahassee, Florida 32301

Phone: 800-222-3448 (V)

VP: 850-270-2641

Website: www.ftri.org



20