

February 12th 2015

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Michael Ely. I have cerebral palsy which it does affects my speech. I use a communication device. I have been an AAC device user for twenty-four years. I have seen communication devices grow up with me when I needed a new communication device. I went from very simple communication device to devices that have environment controls built into them.

My device was funded through Medicare as durable medical equipment. Because Medicare has never agreed to purchase computers for people, the device was shipped to me in a "locked" state, meaning the only feature I had access to was voice output. Fortunately, Medicare and the device manufacturer, the Prentke Romich Company, allowed me to pay a small fee to "unlock" the device, as soon as I received it, so that I could access all of these other computer-like functions. This was important to me because it gave me some independence.

There are some serious changes potentially coming down the Medicare pipeline which will restrict the use of communication devices to voice output only. As of April 1, 2014, Medicare now pays for communication devices like mine over a 13 month rental period, instead of paying for the device in full. This means that, in the future when I get a new communication device, I won't own it until Medicare has paid off the 13 months of rent. It means that I will not be able to pay to "unlock" the device until the 13 month rental period is over.

I use environment controls on my communication device every day as far as operating my desktop computer through Bluetooth, operating my cell phone also through Bluetooth and operating my TV through infrared. Those three things that are built into my communication device through environment controls, I can do them independently through my communication device without having to ask my direct care staff for assistance. When I want to watch TV, I can turn on my TV through my communication device without asking for help.

If there is an emergency for an example, I am out with my staff and something happens to them and I need to text somebody through my communication device for help. I am not saying that it has happened before but it could. This is a good example why I need to operate a cell phone through a new communication device. Another example is that my dentist communicates appointments with me through texting. I will not have any freedom to be able to text my doctors, friends and/or family members when I get a new communication device during the first thirteen months that Medicare is renting it.

I use my desktop computer through my communication device. I graduated from Ivy Tech Community College in May of 2011 with an Associate's degree in Computer Information Systems. My main area of study was Web Development. Without the technology that is in my

communication device to access my computer, I would not be able to get an Associate's degree in computers.

My life would be very limited as to what I could do for the first thirteen months period of time when I get my new communication device. I would not have an opportunity to go to my computer at any time that I want and work on my computer. I would not have a cell phone during the first thirteen months when I get a new communication device because I cannot pick up a phone and start to text.

I feel like that Medicare is taking a few steps back and not realizing what they are doing to people with disabilities lives in how we use our devices every day. These devices are our voices and how we can operate things through our devices in our everyday lives. Have you ever thought about what your life would be like if you didn't have a variety of ways to communicate (like your voice, cell phones, computers, texting, emails, etc.) with others?

Medicare accepted comments from the public on this issue until December 5, 2014. They are currently in the process of reviewing those comments and will make a preliminary decision sometime in May 2015 with a final decision in July 2015. I wanted to inform you of this impending decision so that you can help advocate for Medicare to make the right decision and allow device users like me the chance to access all of the features of our communication systems from day one.

I hope that you can help with this.

Thank you for your time,
Michael Ely