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VIA ECFS

October 31, 2018

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

**Re: EX PARTE FILING – VRS Access Technology Reference Platform and RUE Profile
CG Docket No. 03-123 - In the Matter of Telecommunications Relay Services
and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech
Disabilities; CG Docket No. 10-51 – Structure and Practices of the Video
Relay Service Program**

Dear Ms. Dortch:

Telecommunications for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Inc., National Association of the Deaf, Cerebral Palsy and Deaf Organization, and Deaf Seniors of America (the "Consumer Groups") and the Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Technology for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at Gallaudet University ("RERC") submit this letter in response to the October 17, 2018 letter from ASL Services Holdings, LLC dba Global VRS, CSDVRS, LLC, Convo Communications, LLC, Purple Communications, Inc., and Sorenson Communications, LLC (the "Joint VRS Providers") to Eliot Greenwald, Deputy Chief, Disability Rights Office. Joint VRS Providers asked the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau ("Bureau") to "immediately pause any further development of the VRS Access Technology Reference Platform ("VATRP App") and revisions being made to the associated technical specifications ("RUE Profile")."

Consumer Groups and RERC are not opposed to pausing development of the VATRP App and the RUE Profile. They urge the Bureau to focus on (a) how the ultimate goal of mainstream interoperability can be accomplished and (b) the ability of the community to develop services integrated with VRS, just like the mainstream can develop VoIP services. Any action taken on the VATRP App and RUE Profile should advance this goal of mainstream interoperability.

Consumer Groups and RERC agree that the VATRP App should be developed, deployed and used as a tool for VRS providers to ensure interoperability with each other and their VRS customers, pursuant to the Commission's rules, as well as for direct-to-direct video communications.¹ The VATRP App should not be leading the process to set feature

¹ As part of the bidding process for the VATRP App, Consumer Groups understood the stated purpose of the VATRP App was to be open source and released to the community. This purpose has not yet been met.

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requirements that have not been adopted for the RUE Profile under an appropriate process. The feature set of the VATRP App should match what is developed in a standards body on the RUE Profile. However, the VATRP App should be allowed to test new features that the Joint VRS Providers are permitted to voluntarily satisfy until such time that they are adopted in a standard.

The Joint VRS Providers contend that VATRP App is not yet compliant with the Commission's interoperability requirements. To the extent that is true, compliance with interoperability requirements must be addressed before using it as "reference platform."

Consumer Groups and RERC fully support the Joint VRS Providers' recommendation to transition the RUE Profile from the Commission's vendor to an appropriate standards organization. The Commission has routinely used standards developing organizations such as TTY Forum, SIP Forum, IEEE, ITU-T, IETF, ATIS, CTIA, NENA, TIA, ANSI and other bodies to address matters in VRS, captioning, emergency communication, hearing aid compatibility, and indoor wireless location accuracy, among others. The Commission should not take a different approach for the RUE Profile. Rather, the Commission should utilize an appropriate standards organization and as necessary, seek input from industry and consumers through a rulemaking proceeding as well as the Disability Advisory Committee. The VRS ecosystem must be compatible with applicable standards from the above-referenced bodies for NG9-1-1, location passing, call routing, interoperability with mainstream video calling, call encryption, and more. These features are to the benefit of consumers, and must be implemented apace, even if the RUE Profile is temporarily halted.

Consumer Groups and RERC agree that the VATRP App should be developed consistent with work by the North American Numbering Council ("NANC"). Indeed, the purpose of the VATRP App and the RUE Profile may have arrived at a point where it could be superseded by NANC work and other progress in wireless communications including video and real-time text. As indicated above, any action taken on the VATRP App and RUE Profile should advance this goal of mainstream interoperability. Action on the VATRP App and RUE Profile should not be limited only to interoperability between VRS providers and to VRS as a silo but should consider other video providers in the general telecommunications market.

The Joint VRS Providers maintain that pausing development of the VATRP App and the RUE Profile "would allow for work on other efforts with more immediate and tangible results for consumers, including enhancing customer privacy through encryption, incorporating automatic geolocation for 911 calls from software-based endpoints on mobile devices, addressing skills-based routing and the use of certified Deaf interpreters, and supporting the work of the IVC Working Group." Consumer Groups and RERC support each of these efforts and urge the Joint VRS Providers to provide a written commitment to work on each of these efforts so that they are not set back or harmed by pausing development of the VATRP App and the RUE Profile.

End-to-end encryption is essential to helping VRS providers maintain call confidentiality with their customers. With increasing cyberterrorism issues, encryption has become even more important and must be addressed as soon as possible.

Automatic geolocation for 911 calls from software-based endpoints on mobile devices will allow for faster responses to emergency calls via VRS. It will also ensure that consumers have more diverse and reliable options for 911 calls.

Providers have attached an appendix with problematic features in their filing. Consumer Groups in part agree that some of these features may be out of scope, such as concurrent registration. However, some of the listed features may contribute to a better user experience. For example, one way to provide end-to-end encryption is listed as #8 in the list of problematic features, under SRTP, and possibly should be retained. Consumer control over their address books, especially the ability to port it, is another key feature that has not yet been implemented across providers. Consumer Groups wish to make clear that the features that appear in the problematic list in this filing must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis even if the RUE Profile should be halted.

Consumer Groups have repeatedly supported skills-based routing and the use of certified/qualified Deaf interpreters.² But consumers are still waiting for a system that would better match VRS Interpreters' skills and expertise to callers' communications and subject area needs because providers did not elect to participate in the skills-based routing and certified/qualified Deaf interpreter trials without adequate compensation. Consumer Groups re-iterate their desire for skills-based routing and the use of certified deaf interpreters since each will help achieve functional equivalency.³ Both will allow deaf and hard of hearing individuals to engage with hearing counterparts (or vice versa) in productive calls that are accessible and usable. Too often, deaf and hard of hearing individuals and those with mobility disabilities have experienced subpar interpreting results in VRS and cannot afford to have the same outcome when it comes to certain subject areas like medicine, law, and finance. And those with mobility disabilities have been waiting for effective communication by using certified/qualified Deaf interpreters to enjoy at full accessibility.

Consumer Groups and RERC are thrilled that the FCC established the IVC Working Group to build for a better future in interoperable video calling, not just between deaf and hard of hearing people, or for when either the deaf/hard of hearing or hearing people make VRS calls, but for anyone, disabled or not disabled to make video calls with each other, to see each other in video when they speak with their voices, or in sign language, or a combination of both. The more direct and effective communication options available for use by anyone and at any time, the less that deaf and hard of hearing individuals will resort to using relay services. This should result in a better, more efficient use of the TRS Fund for relay service needs.

² See e.g., *Structure and Practices of the Video Relay Service Program; Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities*, CG Docket Nos. 10-51, 03-123, Reply Comments of Consumer Groups at 8-9. (Mar. 9, 2012); *Structure and Practices of the Video Relay Service Program; Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities*, CG Docket Nos. 10-51, 03-123, Consumer Groups Ex Parte Letter (April 7, 2015); *Structure and Practices of the Video Relay Service Program; Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities*, CG Docket Nos. 10-51, 03-123, Comments of Consumer Groups (Nov. 9, 2017).

³ See Consumer Groups' TRS Policy Statement (April 12, 2011) (attached to *Structure and Practices of the Video Relay Service Program; Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities*, CG Docket Nos. 10-51, 03-123, Consumer Groups' Notice of Ex Parte Meeting (April 12, 2011)) (setting forth ten core functional equivalency principles).

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In summary, Consumer Groups and RERC are not opposed to pausing development of the VATRP App and the RUE Profile. They support transitioning the RUE Profile to an appropriate standards organization and agree that the VATRP App should be developed consistent with work by NANC. They support development of encryption, automatic geolocation for 911 calls, skills-based routing and the use of certified deaf interpreters and seek a written commitment from the Joint VRS Providers to work on each of these efforts so that they are not set back or harmed by pausing development of the VATRP App and the RUE Profile.

Please feel free to contact the undersigned if you have any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Danielle Burt

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