

Jeff Rosen: VRS is not a civil program or a charity; it is a civil right through Americans with Disabilities Act. We are facing a lot of challenges and questions (within the VRS industry). Who better to explain issues and participate in discussions than through the Deaf perspective?

Greetings, I'm Jeff Rosen and I'm General Counsel for Convo Relay. Convo is heavily focused on Deaf customers and interpreters. We encourage dialogues to include different views related to VRS and the Deaf experience. We've hosted several open chats in the past that help promote better understanding of issues that affect the VRS experience. Previous Open Chat topics have included VRS's new Neutral Platform, which will soon be released. In another Open Chat, we talked about frauds and whether they were still happening within the VRS industry. We try to gain better understanding of all perspectives involved. Today, we're talking about the VRS Reform and how it affects Video Interpreters (VIs).

I would like to have this discussion with the views of our great panel today. I'm now introducing Betty Colonomos, Director of Bilingual Meditation Center; Julie Schafer, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy at Registry of Interpreters of the Deaf (RID); and our very own Azora Telford, VP of Interpreting at Convo. How this Open Chat will work is, we will start with several questions to get the discussion going, and then we'll take questions from the public. You can ask questions by: calling us and leaving a video message, ask via Facebook, or ask via Twitter.

Now we're starting with June 2013 when FCC released an important order that impacts VRS Reform. The biggest potential concern is the rates, which decrease 25 cents every 6 months from 2013 to 2017. For small providers, the rate will decrease from \$6/minute to \$4/minute and for large providers, the rate will go down from \$5/minute to \$3.50/minute. FCC also made several other important changes, such as the decision to establish a communication platform, which will change VRS. It also will change the speed of answer, but that is a challenge in court and the court has ordered a hold on this, because the change of speed of answer is highly costly and does not match up with the new rates.

FCC also set up new rules that affect interpreters. For one, FCC does not allow specialized interpreters to take calls in their fields, such as interpreters specializing in legal, medicine, technology, or other fields. FCC also prohibits for VIs to take calls from anywhere other than call centers, and FCC prohibits contract interpreters; they must be employees of a VRS company. Now, we are going to focus on how this FCC Reform affects VIs, because we know how important it is for there to be a strong partnership between the Deaf customers and the interpreters for effective VRS conversations. The better we understand the VIs' experience, the better we understand how to use VRS. We'll start by asking questions and the first one I have is: what is the difference between community (in-person) interpreters and VIs? We'll start this question with Julie on my left.

Julie Schafer: I'm not speaking from the experience of interpreters, but from the view of RID. We feel that the VRS policy contradicts with Code of Professional Conduct. For example, interpreters are expected to self-analyze whether they are right for certain jobs, their language skills, experiences, and other analyses before they accept a job. For VIs, this task is impossible. In VRS calls, there is no time to prepare or pre-screen. This contradicts with the professional expectations of interpreters. Also, access to team interpreting, access to Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDIs), and access to pre- and post-information are really difficult to have in VRS. This is the general overview of the difference between community interpreters and VIs. I'll let Betty and Azora talk more about the interpreters themselves.

Betty: Yes, I'd like to focus on communication effectiveness that FCC and VIs want. One thing people tend to overlook is that in communication, we need language and visual cues. Facial expressions, body language, gestures, angling, pauses, tilting of the head, shifting of the eyes are part of communication. Some research shows that these visual cues actually make up the meat of the meaning in messages; it's in the visual cues, not the language itself. This presents a problem, because VIs cannot see the hearing caller or read their visual cues, only depending on their voice. VIs don't want to depend on the spoken language only; they want to be able to see the hearing caller, too. VIs can see the Deaf caller, but how will the hearing caller understand the Deaf person's visual cues? Often, because of this, the communication is artificial and causes problems.

Jeff: Thank you, Betty. Turning over to Azora.

Azora: Thank you, Jeff. The difference between community interpreters and VIs is clearly that community interpreters are provided with the information that they need to assess whether they are a good fit for a job and they are given the opportunity to decline because they are not the right fit. Because VIs don't have that opportunity, we have to make sure that our interpreters are experienced to be able to put on a thousand different personas for various jobs and to match the sound. Like Betty mentioned, cultural meditation is key in telecommunications and the VRS industry, and that is the difference between visual and audio communication.

Jeff: Thank you, Azora. The second question is the VRS Reform, as discussed previously, include rate cuts, speed of answer, VIs working at call centers only, and more, how will it affect VIs? I'm asking this question to Betty first.

Betty: How do rate cuts affect VIs? Well, in many ways. Video Interpreting is most difficult, because you can't prepare, predict, and you get random callers from different parts of the country, of all ages, races, styles, and more. So, we need the top interpreters who can understand almost any Deaf person. The problem with that is the rate cuts from FCC reduces the profit for VRS providers, so what do they do? Look for interpreters who are cheaper than the top interpreters. The cheapest interpreters are also the least capable of handling versatile calls. The rate cut is a mistake, because the calls will inevitably take more time due to miscommunication, so this doesn't make sense to me. The top interpreters would relay the most efficient calls. Many of the good interpreters that I know work for VRS for extra money, putting in a few hours a day, but with the rate cuts, they won't feel as if it's worthwhile to work in the VRS industry anymore.

Jeff: Thanks, Betty. We're going over to you, Azora. Can you share your perspective on how the VRS Reform impacts VIs?

Azora: The impacts are huge. With the rate cuts, you will begin to see the opposite from what is expected with our SOA (Speed of Answer). This will also result in impacts in our support, resources, workshops and professional development, and most importantly, the connection between the VI and the caller.

Jeff: Thank you, Azora. Julie?

[11 minute mark]

Julie: The most important point here is that the VRS Reform happened without the consideration of the interpreters themselves. The decisions that FCC made did not factor in how the interpreters and their quality would be impacted. Why? Because FCC views interpreters as “dial tones”. When you consider VIs as a core service, then you will consider them an essential part of VRS. Unfortunately, FCC has not gotten to this point yet. With issues like rates, FCC doesn’t consider how interpreting services will be impacted, or how the SOA will impact interpreting services. This is really the fundamental question for FCC: Why haven’t you considered the impact of your regulations on interpreting services thus far? It’s important to understand that when it comes to FCC/VRS discussions, interpreting services haven’t been considered until maybe recently, on June 24th, I believe, in a report by FCC saying that they welcome comments about the working conditions for interpreters. That was the first time. I think it’s important to realize the foundation of the fact that FCC doesn’t consider how their reform impacts interpreting services.

Jeff: Thank you. We’re going to our last question for now, but first, I want to say that I’m touched after hearing all these impacts on VIs. VIs will experience less breaks, more rushed performances, more pressure due to the need of meeting operational costs, which in VRS is human labor. I’m concerned about the well being of our VIs. It is a serious issue that we must face. Now, this question is for you, Azora. What can we, FCC, VRS providers, and customers, do to support the well being of VIs?

Azora: Jeff, you couldn’t have said it better. VRS is a technology-based company and the interpreters are the human element, which is the one thing that connects us all. With the impacts of the rate cuts, you will see— and I hate this term, burnt out— impacts on the quality of interpreting, a drop in team interpreting, and that’s not what the community needs. The community needs a consistent growth, just as much as our technology has grown. If we are able to maintain a growth of support for our interpreters, I promise that you will never see a drop in quality of interpreting. I will continue to fight to ensure that the quality of our interpreters is always rising. FCC will need to revisit the rate cuts. I don’t understand how rate cuts is going to be beneficial. It’s not a win-win situation at all. How we can improve is by maintaining support and showing FCC that they need to revisit what they envision should be cut.

Jeff: Thank you, Azora. Turning over to Betty.

[15 minute mark]

Betty: First thing that I want to question is, why government agencies feels as if they can make policy decisions without the involvement of any experts with experience to advise. They did not seem to ask linguistic experts or interpreters or others for advice, because they see interpreters as machine, instead of humans. That’s the first mistake. They don’t realize that while interpreting, the message goes through the brain and the brain has to answer countless questions to be able to relay the message to another language. They are also expected to, within a timeframe of 10, 15 seconds, throw out everything from the previous call as they answer a new call. If the previous call was a pizza order, then sure, 15 seconds in between the next call would be just fine, but if the previous call was a deep discussion about the death of a parent, or a horrible fight within the family, it causes mental stress for the VIs to immediately switch to a completely different call. People often think about carpal tunnel or other injuries to the hands and wrists, and that is a problem, but to me, most VIs are stressed from mental exhaustion. It seems that FCC has no concept of how communication requires humans, not

machine. The machine part is simply a conveyor, the wires, but the true communication is through people.

Jeff: Thank you. Before we turn over to Julie, I want to mention that RID is a fantastic resource on this issue, which isn't new at all. They have research on Repetitive Strain Injury and they have published various articles on the stress that interpreters experience. RID is also coming out with a survey on this topic, so RID is doing a great job on educating about the well being of interpreters. Julie?

Julie: Thanks. This is such an important question. I think it's important to recognize that FCC has not put in Research and Development money into interpreters. The expenses are for the technology aspect, which is important, I understand that. But the interpreters's jobs are important, too. The first step here is for FCC and companies to invest money in Research relating to VRS interpreters. Right now, there is very limited research on this topic, but the research so far has shown exactly what Betty and Azora have said. Stress and burn-outs are very common. There is a survey from Gallaudet graduate students who researched how many VIs feel stress, and of about 350, 1/3 reported feeling stressed and burnt out. Some factors are: speed of calls, repetitive injuries, fear that comes with 911 calls, and more. Also, our Video Interpreters Members Section (VIMS) have about 1,500 members, which is huge, and we surveyed them about injuries. Many experience Repetitive Stress Injuries, carpal tunnel, and more, and they experience these injuries more and more as time goes by. However, FCC has zero research related to this, so when they set up the rule that says we must answer calls faster, they have no knowledge of how it will impact services. That's a problem, because when we measure call success with SOA, technology, interoperability, it can work, but what about the effectiveness of the call itself? Did the caller get the right appointment time? The right information? This is the key service of VRS.

Jeff: Thank you. Julie's last point hit the nail on the head. I've been involved with VRS audits and all of them measure numbers and data. There's never been an audit about interpreters and how effective they are. It is actually a requirement for interpreters to be effective, which is more important to Deaf people, but the focus has been too heavily on frauds and measurements of quantities. We must move away from that right now. We're going to let the audience ask questions now.

[@montalette: #OpenChatConvo How does the FCC's VRS reform change the experience for Deaf callers?]

Jeff: (repeating the question). Well, that's a good question. We're looking at the partnership between interpreters and Deaf callers. Interpreters have always measured their success on whether the Deaf caller felt that the messages were relayed well. I want to let this group answer and we'll start with Betty.

Betty: Good question. Two things I'm immediately thinking of. First, it seems that FCC isn't looking for feedback from Deaf people or strive to understand their user experience. They are so focused on the middle, what goes on in between one caller to the other, but what about those end users? Consumers seem last to be considered. The other thing is, maybe I'm wrong, but I understand that FCC doesn't let the Deaf caller to request a different interpreter if they experience a communication problem. Deaf callers can only change interpreters if it is a gender preference. It's sad to say that we have a long, long way to go as a VRS industry. Most of the

interpreters are not very skilled yet, and the Deaf callers can't change interpreters for one that they feel is effective. That is why we need CDIs and team interpreting. The VI can call for help during a call and make it effective, rather than have the Deaf caller try for different interpreters, which is frustrating.

[23 minute mark]

Jeff: I'd like to clarify a few things. It is FCC's policy to allow changing of interpreters if the call is not effective, but most customers don't know this. Most feel like they have to be stuck with the same interpreter and that they have no choice. For community interpreters, Deaf people can choose their preferred interpreters, but in VRS calls, this is prohibited. You cannot choose your interpreters. So, changing interpreters is possible, but doesn't happen often. Second, Betty mentioned CDIs. I want to explain about Certified Deaf Interpreters, which are used a lot in Video Relay Interpreting (VRI) now. VRI is used for when the Deaf person is in the same room as the hearing person that they want to communicate with, often in work situations. We're seeing a growth in VRI, which is awesome. For some situations, however, VRI isn't appropriate, like in a hospital or medical setting, it might not be the best fit. For emergency or last-minute requests, VRI works great. CDIs make a huge impact here; it's a Deaf interpreter working with a hearing interpreter to be able to best relay the Deaf customer's messages. This is hugely successful and it's growing right now, but in VRS, this isn't allowed. Not prohibited, but not included in the rates. This is really a loss. I'll let Julie answer the same question now.

Julie: RID's vision is that we strongly believe that linguistic rights are equivalent to human rights. This principle is important when discussing VRS, because if the VIs feel stressed, burnt out, or injured, then the Deaf community isn't getting the best possible interpreting service. The two are strongly tied together. When FCC makes decisions that hurt the interpreters, they are also hurting the Deaf community. This goal of linguistic rights cannot be achieved when you neglect interpreters. The term, functional equivalency, in VRS really depends on the VI service and if the VIs are, again, stressed, burnt out, or injured, they can't provide you the best service that you deserve.

Azora: When I saw that question, the first thing I thought of was when a VI asks for an in-house team interpreting or possible transfers.. the inability to request this causes burn-outs. It's not effective communication. Team interpreters support each other, just like community interpreters switch with each other in 20-minute intervals. That is the best solution for our callers, having a team interpreter sit together and be there for the same call so that neither ever feels like they've lost the groove of the call. Cold transfer outs to other call centers cause a feeling of disconnection between the VI and caller and the most important thing is the connection between them. The well being, mental health, exhaustion are big impacts from rate cuts.

[27 minute mark]

Jeff: Thank you. Next question, please.

[@ewilliam_: How will a neutral platform create jobs in the Deaf community? Seems impossible. #openchatconvo]

Jeff: Okay, this is a good question. Interesting question. Today, the focus is on VIs, but the government-run Neutral Platform causes a big change in VRS, because it will create more VRS companies. How will that affect our experience? Do you mind if we start with you, Azora?

Azora: How does Neutral Platform impacts us, is that the question? To me, honestly, Neutral Platform is the same concept as the platform that phones follow to ensure that connection will happen between all devices. I see pros and cons to Neutral Platform. The pro is ensuring interoperability will happen, but with features, we can go into this at another time.

Jeff: Thank you for your response, Azora. Julie, do you want to add to this?

Julie: Sure. RID has not established a position on Neutral Platform yet, but our concern overall, whether Neutral Platform happens or not, is that we must require a minimum standard for interpreters. Without this standard, whatever platform or service we use or whatever idea FCC comes up with next will not create a positive impact on interpreters.

Jeff: Thank you. Okay, next question.

[Alyssa Romano: Question for Jeff: should vas interpreters only work at vrs call centers? #openchatconvo]

[30 minute mark]

Jeff: I need glasses (chuckling). Okay. (repeating question) This is important. FCC prohibits VIs to work anywhere other than in call centers. What's your view, Betty?

Betty: I've seen some companies with independent interpreters who work from their own offices, but I can understand the confidentiality problem, lack of control and security. I have no problem with all VIs working in call centers, but I agree with Julie, those call centers need to have standards to follow, for working conditions and many other things. I think that having all VIs work together in call centers is a good idea, for improved monitoring.

Jeff: Julie, do you have anything to add?

Julie: Sure. RID has taken a position in which we said that we could support VIs working from private settings, as long as the safety and technological requirements are met. What happens if the power goes out at that private setting? Other requirements would need to be met, such as ensuring that 911 calls would not mistakenly be redirected to the private setting's address. There would be no team or support during those calls from private settings. There are many concerns that, if not carefully considered, could potentially be dangerous for the VI and the Deaf caller. So, RID could support VIs working from private settings, but an in-depth discussion about what that would look like is in order.

Jeff: Any more comments, Azora?

Azora: Yes, I'd love to add to that. I think it's important to have a call center base for support, to ensure that our policies and regulations are being run appropriately. Also, the safety and well being of VIs. Not everyone makes right decisions during the heat of the moment, so it's

important to have a team there to say, “We’re here to support you if you need transfers,” and things like that. When a VI works from home, I see that being compromised.

Jeff: Interesting perspectives. Some Deaf customers have a different view. They say that call centers forces a lot of interpreters to flock to certain areas, urban areas. A lot of VIs who look for jobs cannot stay in their community and have to relocate to call center areas, and many do. How does that affect the Deaf communities? They lose interpreters in their local areas for their jobs, public meetings, even schools. You know, school interpreters are one of the lowest paying interpreting jobs, so when call centers suck in interpreters, there is less availability of interpreters in other communities. The pool of interpreters is limited. The pipeline of interpreters availability is small, so we have to carefully assess not only the impact that call centers have on interpreters but also the impact on Deaf communities. We don’t want to throw the eco-system of the Deaf community off-balance. Okay, next question.

[Sheri Ann Farinha @xoSheri: #openchatconvo who will have this oversight of interpreters? where are the standards of interpreters? We have waited 10 years for this!]

Jeff: (repeating question) This is an important question and we’ll start with Julie.

Julie: Thank you, Jeff, and thank you, Sheri, for your question. It’s a very good question. First, you’re right, FCC has ignored the interpreters for 10 years and that’s a long time. Now, we have to figure out how to measure quality. RID believes in minimum standards, which mean certificated interpreters. That’s the starting point. It doesn’t mean that certified interpreters are qualified for every call, but it’s a starting point to determine the quality of an interpreter. It’s also important for FCC to invest in interpreter quality, just like they check off the quality of SOA, technology, and interoperability. They should check off the quality of interpreting, too. That might be a rating system where Deaf callers can rate 1 to 5 according to their satisfaction with their interpreters, or a measurement of how many times the interpreter was switched. I don’t know what exactly yet, but we need to start this dialogue now on how to measure interpreting quality in FCC because FCC is a regulator of what is essentially an interpreting service.

Jeff: Thank you, Julie. Now, we’re turning over to Betty.

Betty: Good question. There’s one problem with using certification as starting standard is that there’s not enough certified interpreters to meet the employment demand. That’s one problem. Another is that VRS companies have their own screening systems for hiring their own interpreters. One possibility is, while interpreters have not gotten their certifications, RID along with CIT (Conference of Interpreters Trainers) need to work together to develop a guideline for VRS companies’s process of hiring interpreters. What do the standards look like, the questions that will arise, the screening process? Deaf people need to be on that panel. This is a step. It’s not perfect, but we can’t depend on certifications alone, because the demand is too high.

Jeff: Thank you, Betty. Azora?

Azora: I’m in total agreement with Betty on that one. The demand is too high, so it’s important that we do filter for qualified interpreters and certified interpreters, finding a good balance that supports both types of interpreters. It’d be nice to see a standard for all VRS companies. I think that’d be a good step for FCC to make.

Jeff: Your ability to communicate effectively should not depend on which VRS company you use; it should be the minimum expectation. FCC measures many things, but not the effectiveness of communication. This causes challenges during the VRS Reform where we're experiencing rate cuts and simultaneously experiencing a growth of VIs. This is the right time for us to be talking about this. Next question, please.

[Video mail: I'm wondering about how long we've stayed quiet and sat on our hands. I hope that FCC opens its ASL line so we can express ourselves.]

Jeff: I appreciate your question of where this type of discussions have been for a long while now. There are several groups that have been actively discussing topics like this. Again, we'll start with Julie because RID works closely with NAD on many of these important issues.

Julie: To clarify the question, where did the discussion start and lead up to now?

Jeff: Yes, there appears to have been no complaints, so where did these discussions start and how can we move forward with these discussions?

Julie: I think it's important to mention that, as Jeff said, in FCC's June 2013 report in which FCC turned down certification requirement and skill-based options. FCC explained their reasoning, which was that there haven't been complaints from customers about interpreting quality, so it's important to understand your role as customers to file complaints and to let RID know about your experiences. We're going to start RID Policy Task Force, which will result in a guide for us, and it needs your opinions. That's how, together, we can achieve functional equivalency for real.

Jeff: Absolutely. Does anyone else want to add anything?

Betty: Yes, two things. First, VRS users need access to where they can file complaints. Right now, there's not really a system in place where Deaf users can express their opinions to someone who can understand ASL. I don't think NAD has a person designated to receive complaints related to VRS. NAD should have an Ombudsman of some kind. Second, FCC originally paid VRS a lot of money and providers were able to hire the top interpreters and paid them well. Top interpreters flocked to the VRS industry and the service was good for a while, and then the cuts began along with the frauds. That same service has been declining since then and may worsen.

Jeff: It's hard to see this happening, but it's what we have to face. Azora, any thoughts to add?

Azora: I think they both answered that question well. I have nothing else to add.

Jeff: Great. One thing that needs to be stated is that FCC does now have an ASL Contact Line where you can express your comments directly to FCC via sign language, which is a wonderful development by the FCC, but it's not beneficial if you don't use it. I'm aware that many Deaf users do call for general complaints, but we need to think about how to include the opinions of interpreters. We've since been heavily focused on the Deaf perspective, which is understandable, but this is a partnership between the Deaf callers and the interpreters. The only way we can effectively communicate is if we include the perspective of interpreters. Next question, please.

[Mary Pat Withem @MPWithem: #openchatconvo what have VRS providers done to work together to educate FCC on needs of their employees that may not be obvious overhead?]

[44 minute mark]

Jeff: These types of discussions require time, resources, and more. Who will pay for that? We've had some wonderful organizations that really promote these types of conversations, but more in-depth will require resources. Where will that come from? That's a really important question and I'll let Betty answer first.

Betty: That's a great question. I think that FCC should be the one to pay the money for a conference for VRS providers to share ideas, successes, failures, and problems. The people at FCC should also be there to see these dialogues, mixing in with the providers along with interpreters. It would be beneficial for FCC to learn from the trial and error of the VRS providers. FCC should pay for this; it is our tax money.

Jeff: Great point. I want to mention again, for your information, that FCC did budget some money from the TRS fund, which is the money that you all pay through phone services, which include: 15 million for Neutral Platform, 3 million for Research and Development— taken from rates, which hasn't been spent yet, and 2 million— taken from rates— to pay for Outreach, which FCC wants to see go to educating companies like banks to not hang up immediately when they hear the VI's message. That's important, but that's out there. What about within our own community? Educating outsiders is fine, but these outsiders come and go all the time whereas Deaf people will always be Deaf forever, which is great. The interpreters also stay in business for many years, like Betty. So, how do we invest within our community? So, I appreciate this important point. Next question, please.

[William Albright @ewilliam_: How can VRS industry recruit & retain top talent if rates are cut? #openchatconvo]

Jeff: Okay, that's a good question. How can we recruit qualified interpreters who are capable, prepared, well-trained, with the right kind of expertise and experience, rather than just throw the interpreters straight from training programs into Video Relay calls and have them learn on the job? That's dangerous. I'll let Azora answer.

Azora: Really, quality comes from experience. We need to make sure our VIs have had enough time in this field, heavy training, mentorship, and more, for our callers. We cannot cut these at any expense, regardless of what changes FCC makes. We must maintain equal access and quality of interpreting. There is a screening and assessment process.

Jeff: Okay, Julie?

Julie: Until FCC makes interpreting a priority, not necessarily the top one but a high priority, VRS providers have no incentive to recruit the top interpreters. There's no benefit, so they can just continue to hire whatever interpreters are available with no real consideration of their qualifications. Until FCC has expectations of interpreting standards, you will see a range of quality in interpreting, depending on the call center, the company, the time of the day. It shouldn't be this way. You should get quality interpreters anytime, anywhere, at all times. That's your right.

[49 minute mark]

Jeff: Thank you, Julie. Betty?

Betty: The reality is, our country is based on competition and profit. That's business. FCC does not look at VRS as a business but a service to Deaf people; therefore, they don't see a reason why VRS companies should profit. The contradiction here is that FCC is cutting rates for the sake of our tax money, but if you want good service, then we need competition. Businesses will compete to provide the best service, and that way, you get what you pay for.

Jeff: Excellent point. I have a lot of respect for the people at FCC and we work with FCC everyday, and while there are many good people, they sometimes don't focus on the real issues. Often, they say that VRS is a benefit and I have to tell them that no, it's not a welfare program but an accessibility right as stated by ADA, Title Four. Another time recently, I was told by FCC that our service is free, but no, that's not true. All of us pay for this service through our phone services charges. VRS is often mistaken as a benefit or a free service, but it is a right. It should not be limited or watered down, because it does cost money and the return that we get from this investment is huge: Deaf people have increased opportunities, economy, education, jobs, and more. Deaf people used to have to ask neighbors to make calls for them, and we are now independent and have relationships with our interpreters instead, which is a beautiful thing. We aren't complaining about our challenges here, but discussing how we can make positive changes that will push us towards true functional equivalency. Now, I apologize, but we've gotten so many questions and only have time for one more before wrapping up. As per usual, you can still ask questions and we'll respond after the show. Last question.

[Susan Larrison @ThatsSoSuz: #openchatconvo how can we educate the FCC on the impact of their rate cuts on the VRS industry?]

[52 minute mark]

Jeff: That's a good question to close with. (repeating question) I think it's best to start with RID, because it is an organization that has regular meetings with FCC, so we'll start with Julie.

Julie: As Jeff mentioned, we file comments and have meetings with FCC, but this is not enough. We need you and your experiences with interpreters to convince FCC that it is a priority. Until we, together, support that goal, it will continue to fail. The most important thing is that the interpreters and the Deaf community work together in this. The best way we can make a change is by filing comments, keep telling FCC what you think. Public comments are also important, not just complaints. Public comments about your experience are very important, because our advocacy really depends on you. NAD, RID, and other organizations continue to file comments, but it's important for the customers and interpreters to file, too. I can't emphasize the importance of this enough.

Betty: I'm chuckling because when Jeff contacted me to ask if I could get involved with this, I wondered why he asked me because I had just filed a comment with FCC based on my frustration. Jeff said that it was because I spoke up, and that's when I realized that people really are listening. However, FCC says that they only get one, two, or three comments. I know that writing English may be a barrier for some. That's where working with interpreters comes in. If Deaf people prefer to sign their complaints, then the interpreters can translate that into written

English. We need to keep sending them in. Sometimes it feels like the government is so big that it's useless to send our comments, but they do matter. It's the reason I'm here today, because I did file a comment. You can, too. Please do. It's important!

Jeff: Wise advice. Azora?

Azora: Wow, I'm just thinking of when interpreters first came in and how long it took for ADA to make a difference. With VRS, it's still new, at 10 years. We need to make sure that the community, together, pushes for equal access, and not just in interpreting but in telecommunications. Many states don't have local interpreters and have to travel to other states. I want to see possibilities grow in both community and video interpreting. So, please, make your comments on what you think would be fair for our community with FCC.

Jeff: Thank you, Azora. We'll now have brief closing comments from everyone, starting with Betty.

Betty: Time flew, wow! Several things that I think are important: for one, Deaf people want that access to language, which is a human right, but if you have the attitude where you're grateful for what you have and don't want to complain or be negative about what you have, those in power will only remain in power. You have to show that you have power, because you do. That goes for interpreters, too. If you're not happy with your working conditions or you're not satisfied with the interpreting services that you see, and many do tell me that they overhear unsatisfactory interpreting but feel that they can't do anything about it, we have to fight for the best for everyone. We also need local Deaf communities to work with interpreters. Don't give up.

Julie: RID's mission is excellent interpreting, and that's not limited only to community, education, or court interpreting. It applies to VRS interpreting, too. That's why we're here today, so thank you for this opportunity. This discussion is so important for us, as an eco-system and we can't stop today; we must continue. I hope that you will be involved with RID's committees, Task Forces, so that we can together change things with FCC. Until we work together, we'll just continue to experience the same frustrations. Thank you for your energy and passion. I'm inspired today!

Jeff: Thank you, Julie. Good words. Azora?

Azora: Like everybody said, our work's not done. It's only just begun, with technology growing in rapid speed. We need the same growth speed for our accessibility and we're not going to stop and let changing times limit our access. We have to keep pushing for a better tomorrow and that happens through partnership. Thank you for this opportunity to talk about this and I look forward to more in-depth conversations for a better future for our Deaf community and interpreters.

Jeff: Thank you, Azora. I'll close by saying that this is a powerful meeting today, because it shows how far we've come and how much further we have to go. I come from a Deaf family and I'm a third-generation Deaf person; I've spent all my life interacting with Deaf people and had a strong identity with sign language. Outside my family and community, I struggled with interaction for jobs, places of government, etc. It's so important to have a connection with interpreters. We've long since had strong connections with community interpreters; we know them well and they know us well, forming a strong bond. Now, with video interpreting, we want the same

values to be instilled. Often, VIs wonder if they did a good job or not. This is a tough and new challenge. I really appreciate this opportunity to talk about it. FCC has a huge role in this. FCC has since been focused on frauds and now the call to action for FCC is to have them talk about functional equivalency with customers and interpreters. Not, "we'll provide this service for you", but "we'll do this together. Convo's goal here is not to sway you towards one direction or another but to provide you with the information that you need. Please do share your experiences and opinions with FCC. There are many resources out there and I'd be happy to be one of them. Contact me at jeff@convorelay.com and I'll refer you to a person or group if I'm unable to answer a question that you have. I want to see you succeed in whatever your passion is, with full participation in the American society, which is what ADA stands for. Okay, thank you for your time. I wish you a good evening.

Everyone: Bye!