

-----Original Message-----

From: Bsteele013@aol.com [mailto:Bsteele013@aol.com]**Sent:** Wednesday, April 07, 2004 10:26 AM**To:** Michael Powell; Kathleen Abernathy; Michael Coppins; Jonathan Adelstein; KJMWEB**Cc:** cheppner@nvrc.org; BFFPSTEELE@aol.com**Subject:** VRS and TV Capationing

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APR - 9 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

Dear Commissioners,

First of all, the Video Relay Service (VRS) is very important to me and your people at FCC can make relay functionally equivalent to the telephone service available to hearing person. Video Relay Service ("VRS") solves many of the shortcomings of text-based relay. VRS allows a deaf or hard of hearing person to make a telephone call via an Internet video connection between the user and the relay center staffed with ASL interpreters. VRS thus allows conversations to occur at approximately normal speed. Moreover, VRS allows for the transmission of non-verbal or extra-verbal communication. Lastly, ASL allows deaf and hard of hearing persons to converse in their natural language, ASL. However, current funding constraints are hampering the ability of VRS to provide functionally equivalent service.

Because VRS is Internet based, the FCC has required that it be paid for through the Interstate TRS fund, administered by the National Exchange Carrier Association ("NECA"). In July of 2003, the FCC cut the rate paid VRS providers by some 55 percent of the previous rate and by some 45 percent of what, NECA recommended. As a result, VRS providers had to immediately cut back operating hours and lay-off staff. Wait times just to place a call (the equivalent according to the FCC of a dial tone) are now averaging well in excess of a minute, several times the standard the FCC set for text-based relay. Moreover, the lack of funding prevents development of wireless VRS, or service to users with computers that use operating systems other than Windows.

Please make sure that you ensure that the relay is "available, to the extent possible and in the most efficient manner, to hearing-impaired and speech-impaired individuals in the United States.

Other things:

"I was shocked and disappointed to learn for the FCC's denial of NVRC's complaint against WJLA for not providing captions when the news of the sniper shootings hit the airwaves. I can tell you that most deaf people living or working within 10 miles of a "hit" worried about being the next target. Not an emergency? Of course it was."

"I am deaf and I live less than 15 miles from White Flint Mall and Kensington, Maryland, where about seven people got shot by the snipers last year...yet local news were not closed captioned. It is recommended that the complaint EB-02-TC-161 be reconsidered."

"Recent events in the news, such as the Capital city sniper shootings and the highway shootings in Ohio, and the lack of immediate news captioning coverage have us extremely concerned that we will be able to react to these events appropriately. For example, we would have chosen different routes home, changed our schedules, and thus increased our personal safety."

"Our eyes are our ears so radio announcements are of no use to us. We ask that your Enforcement Bureau remember this."

Sincerely,
Bob Steele
20804 Amber Hill Ct
Germantown, MD 20874

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