



September 28, 2009

Chairman Julius Genachowski
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Support for Deaf Consumers and Provider Request for VRS Rulemaking Petition

Dear Chairman Genachowski:

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) is the nation's largest membership organization representing the professionals who facilitate communication between people who are deaf or hard of hearing and people who can hear. Interpreters serve as professional communicators in a vast array of settings such as: churches, schools, courtrooms, hospitals and theaters, as well as on political grandstands, television and specific to this letter, in the provision of video relay services (VRS).

The interpreting services provided by our members are essential to the delivery of video relay, and our members are employed by a variety of providers of these services. Accordingly, our members are keenly aware of the FCC's inquiries into the various practices within the industry, and as a member of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consumer Action Network (DHHCAN), we would like to take this opportunity to individually echo the previously filed Consumer letter¹ which supports the Commission in its efforts to examine the industry to eliminate instances of waste, fraud and abuse, resulting in the preservation of the important trust relationship between service providers, interpreters and deaf consumers.

RID is an independent organization representing the interests of our members, and we do not endorse one service provider over another, however in this case, we do join the sentiments of the Consumers in applauding Purple Communications for its leadership in submitting a filing that raises legitimate questions regarding the rights and rules of TRS. We support the request from Consumers and Purple that the FCC place the filing on public notice as soon as practicable so that the voices of all stakeholders can be heard in this process.

¹ Letter of Support for Purple Petition for Rulemaking, dated September 11, 2009 sent to Chairman Genachowski from a coalition of Consumer groups including; Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Inc., National Association of the Deaf, California Coalition of Agencies Serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Inc., American Association of Deaf-Blind, Association of Late-Deafened Adults, Inc., Hearing Loss Association of America, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consumer Advocacy Network, American Association of People with Disabilities.

The growth of video relay has transformed the interpreting profession in profound ways, and we believe if the FCC is successful in its policy efforts to widen the availability of broadband services to all Americans that more deaf consumers will have access to these important services and use of video relay and the need for qualified interpreters will continue to rise. This poses a wonderful opportunity for broader access to these vital services and growth in our profession, but in our view, it also poses a potential problem if ambiguities and confusion that exist regarding the rules in the VRS market persist.

Specifically, our members abide by a strict code of conduct and confidentiality (NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct) that must never be breached. This confidentiality is the bond of trust we have with deaf consumers who place confidence in us each and every time we are asked to interpret, whether in a church, school, courtroom or behind the camera of a video relay terminal. In the case of VRS, this bond cannot be weakened by providers or regulators asking interpreters to be arbiters of VRS call content, breaking transparency rules and determining which calls are for legitimate purposes and which are not. That is outside the scope of the interpreter's duties and erodes our core obligations to the Deaf community.

We join with Consumers in support of Purple's request that the Commission tackle the difficult issues related to the rights afforded a deaf person to use the telephone system in a manner that is functionally equivalent to hearing counterparts. People who are deaf should have equivalent tools that hearing persons have in the workplace and being able to perform functions that would use the telephone in the ordinary performance of their job, including the use of business focused conference calls. In the spirit of transparency and fact-gathering, we also agree with the recommendation to bring this issue into the public forum so all stakeholders can discuss these complicated civil rights issues and bring clarity to our interpreters who are in the middle of a situation where a deaf consumer needs access and their job is to deliver it. As interpreters, our members want to make sure their duties are always lawful, and we believe clearer rules established and published will help improve the industry and make the enforcement process more clear.

The challenge all stakeholders (FCC, consumers, providers and interpreters) face in the delivery of these vital services is how to distinguish legitimate use of the service from one that is not, while preserving the code of professional conduct and confidentiality ethos that is absolutely essential to a healthy and properly functioning relationship between consumers and interpreters. Interpreters cannot speak "for" deaf consumers. We work 'with' them, and accordingly, we should not be the arbiters of which of their calls are appropriate and which are not, otherwise we risk eroding this delicate and important trust relationship.

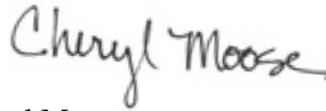
RID realizes that some of the topics included in the petition for rulemaking are also the subject of ongoing industry-wide inquiries, but in our view, the lack of rule clarity may likely be a contributor to some of the inquiries, and policy clarity is essential for all stakeholders sooner than later.

RID looks forward to working with consumer advocacy groups and all VRS providers to ensure that equal communication access is achieved. With that, we extend our support to Purple and Consumers in respectfully requesting the FCC to place on public notice the Purple Petition for Rulemaking.

Respectfully,



Clay Nettles
RID Executive Director



Cheryl Moose
RID President

cc: Commissioner Michael J. Copps
Commissioner Robert M. McDowell
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Meredith Attwell Baker

