

Ensuring that deaf individuals have access to VRS and encouraging improvements in VRS should be a high priority for the FCC. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires the FCC to make available to all deaf individuals nationwide "functionally-equivalent" communications.

You will soon determine the future of VRS. When you set the VRS rate, you will determine whether America makes progress toward the statutory goals of functional equivalence, nationwide access and inclusion - or force deaf users to revert to TTY communications. And, you will determine whether VRS fulfills its potential to drive broadband adoption by the deaf, even in the face of poverty and isolation. The FCC should be increasing the availability and use of VRS, not cutting back. It should adopt a rate that encourages continuing improvements in VRS technology and continues to improve services levels. Recent developments in VRS are a good example of how the service can be improved, such as enhanced 911 services, 10-digit numbering, a larger and better-trained pool of interpreters and better videophones with an array of enhanced features. Monthly payments for broadband are a big expense for many deaf people, and instead of trying to cut back on VRS, you should be exploring ways to make VRS over broadband more affordable to deaf individuals.

Progress towards functional equivalence will be destroyed if the FCC does not encourage VRS providers to improve VRS and make it more widely available. VRS is a recent and dramatic advancement that benefits those who are deaf, but so much more can be done. It would be tragic if the FCC were to destroy this broadband service that is so vital to the deaf.

I, myself, use this service as the only way to communicate with my deaf twin brother, and would miss it sorely, if the FCC's decision takes away his financial ability to have it.