

" (a) Requirements for Federal departments and agencies

(1) Accessibility

(A) Development, procurement, maintenance, or use of electronic and information technology

When developing, procuring, maintaining, or using electronic and information technology, each Federal department or agency, shall ensure, UNLESS an undue burden would be imposed on the department or agency, that the electronic and information technology allows, regardless of the type of medium of the technology

...

(ii) individuals with disabilities who are members of the public seeking information or services from a Federal department or agency to have access to and use of information and data that is COMPARABLE to the access to and use of the information and data by such members of the public who are not individuals with disabilities." - (Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended

29 U.S.C. § 794 (d))

Although I have only been a communications assistant for a little under a year, I am often dumbfounded by the time and patience our deaf customers display when using our service. And as much as this baffles me, even more so I can not comprehend the trust our users put in us to correctly and confidentially relay their most valuable personal information.

It is very upsetting to me that the quality of communication resources to the deaf and hard of hearing company could be jeopardized or even completely diminished by a proposed cut in funding. Ultimately, if this were to take place, jobs would be lost which means more calls per VRS interpreter. If VRS has funds cut, the dominoes will fall quickly, one by one, leaving our customers with a disorganized mess and ultimately breaking the trust that we've so vigorously built over the years. Less funding for VRS means fewer interpreters, resulting in more calls per person. The queues will become horrific so the deaf community will begin to turn even more so to text relay, yet again creating another flaw of supply and demand. Reputable relay services will become flooded with calls and deaf users will ultimately be forced to resort to relay companies that limit what can and cannot be communicated via text.

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states "individuals with disabilities who are members of the public seeking information or services from a Federal department or agency to have access to and use of information and data that is COMPARABLE to the access to and use of the information and data by such members of the public who are not individuals with disabilities." We blessed hearing members of the public do not have to wait ten minutes to call our mothers to wish them a Happy Mother's Day. We hearing do not have to worry that someone may have mis-typed important information when calling to pay off bills that could have life altering effects if not paid. We can sleep peacefully at night knowing that we didn't have to share our most intimate secrets with a third party, a stranger. But we do need to communicate. We can not thrive to our fullest in society without communication. A reduction in funding will not only create a much larger demand than supply, but it is

ultimately going to result in poor customer service as the larger, reliable relay companies will be reduced in size and service availability and smaller companies will suddenly receive more business than they are equipped for. As hearing people, our calls and conversations are instant, fast, efficient, and information is given correctly as we have the assurance of hearing the other involved party with our own ears. If communication services for deaf people are to be 'comparable to the access and use of the information and data by such members of the public who are not individuals with disabilities' then wouldn't limiting these services be breaking this legal standard?

My greatest concern is our deaf customers, but also to be taken into consideration is the huge possibility that many employees of the "big dogs" in relay services will suffer immensely and people will lose their jobs in an economy that is suffering and most likely will be for at least the next ten years if not longer. I know that personally having this job has changed my life immensely financially and I am grateful for the funding that has been provided to our relay service in the past. But if funding is limited, my life like so many other employees, will change dramatically, only throwing us back into our country's turbulent economic sea. Employing VRS and text relay interpreters is not only helping the deaf community, but helping to strengthen the economy as our paychecks are being circulated back into our communities and helping local businesses to thrive.

We who have been granted the gift of hearing too often forget to appreciate what a joy it is to hear our children's voices, listen to the radio, or hear the comforting sound of a friend's voice in a time of need. Please, I urge you, do not take the next best thing to hearing away from our customers. Instead, please help us in an effort to make communicating for deaf and hard of hearing individuals to go above and beyond 'comparable' standards. What 'undue burden' has been placed to justify this decision that will most certainly result in major hinderances to the quality of life for our deaf friends? Please, have compassion and a true desire to raise the standards of good communication services for those who TRULY NEED THE HELP.