

5/11/10

Hello Interpreter Team.

Over the course of the last few days many of you have contacted me with questions about the recent FCC rate proposal—what it could mean for the deaf customers we serve and what it could mean for you as Sorenson Video Interpreters and employees. Your concerns are valid.

Should the FCC adopt its proposed rate, VRS as we know it today would end. SVRS services will change dramatically. At a minimum, we would no longer be able to provide outreach programs to more deaf individuals. Hold times would increase, interpreter training programs would decline, research and development of new, innovative technologies would cease and the march toward functionally-equivalent communications would slow, if not cease altogether. If the FCC adopts one of its even more extreme proposals, Sorenson will be driven into bankruptcy. This is a grim picture. However, as Sorenson Communications President and CEO Pat Nola has assured us, there is something each of us can do to make a difference.

The FCC wants to hear from those involved in the VRS industry. Interpreters get a unique, up-close-and-personal view of the VRS industry each day. Because of your role in the VRS process, you can help the FCC understand the importance of adopting a fair and reasonable VRS rate, one that advances the mandate of the Americans with Disabilities Act for “functionally-equivalent” communications for the deaf.

If you have not done so already, I encourage each of you, if you are so inclined, to take time now to submit a comment to the FCC . The steps to contact the FCC are listed below.

Step 1. Go to <http://fjallfoss.fcc.gov/ecfs/upload/begin?procName=03-123&filedFrom=X>

Step 2. Complete the form with your personal information (all fields with an asterisk are required).

Step 3. Enter your comments. (You can write your own or can copy and paste the sample letter or bullet points provided below in the body of this email.)

Step 4. Select the “Continue” button.

Step 5. You will be presented with a confirmation page to review your comment before submitting comment. Select the “Confirm” button and your comment will be submitted.

I have always been able to depend on our interpreters to advocate for services that are empowering for deaf people. Now is the time for interpreters to let their voice be heard as without each of you, there is no Video Relay Services. The FCC has not specifically requested information or feedback from the interpreting community, now you can let them know your position. Please encourage your family and friends who are in support of a fair and predictable rate to send in their comments to the FCC. We do make a difference every day, and together we can make a difference now!

Thanks,

Chris

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**see sample letter below**

## **Sample letter to be Filed with the FCC from a Sorenson Video Interpreter**

As an interpreter of Video Relay Service (VRS) provider, I have the great fortune of assisting deaf individuals in communicating by videophone in American Sign Language using VRS. I have seen first-hand that this empowering service is a vital link that connects deaf people to the hearing community.

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

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 – a product that most deaf individuals no longer own as TTYs have been replaced by videophone equipment. And, you will determine whether VRS fulfills its potential to drive broadband adoption by the deaf, even in the face of poverty and isolation.

I was deeply troubled by the Commission’s recent Public Notice on VRS rates. These proposals would put an end to VRS as we know it. My employer has already informed me that if these proposed rates are adopted, our company would head into bankruptcy. This would be disastrous for deaf VRS users.

The FCC should be increasing the availability and use of VRS, not cutting back. You should adopt a rate that encourages continuing improvements in VRS technology and continues to improve service 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.

Recent reports of fraud in the VRS industry are disturbing to employees who work for a company that has operated within current FCC guidelines and has worked to maintain the integrity of the VRS fund. The FCC must devote more of its time and energy to focusing on the elimination of fraud.

I urge you to establish a fair and predictable rate for VRS that will encourage VRS providers to invest in improving VRS and in reaching more deaf individuals.

Sincerely,

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**Or if you would rather say your own words with some key points refer to the sample bullet points below.**

**Sample Bullet Points to be Used by a Sorenson VRS Interpreter in Filing Comments with the FCC**

The rates for VRS proposed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in its April 30 Public Notice would be a disaster for VRS because –

- The rates are so low that it would be the end of VRS as we know it today. No provider would seek to provide VRS at the low rates proposed by the FCC.
- The FCC proposes a low interim VRS rate. A better option would be a multi-year VRS rate, which would allow VRS providers to continue to invest in their offerings for the deaf. VRS and the improvements made to it over the years have moved us closer to the goal of “function equivalence” mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This rate proposal would destroy that progress and move us further from achieving the goals of the ADA.
- My employer has informed me that this rate proposal would lead our company into bankruptcy, leaving our deaf customers without the vital VRS service they have come to expect.
- This proposal would almost certainly mean that my job and countless others would be in jeopardy in an economy where finding a new job would be extremely difficult, if not impossible.