

Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, DC 20554

In re:)
)
TELECOMMUNICATIONS RELAY)
SERVICES FOR DEAF AND HARD) CG Docket 03-123
OF HEARING AND SPEECH)
DISABLED PERSONS)

To: The Commission

***PETITION FOR RULE MAKING FOR VIDEO ASSISTED STS (VID-STS)
TO FACILITATE PHONE COMMUNICATION
FOR PEOPLE WITH SEVERE SPEECH DISABILITIES***

Speech Communications Assistance by Telephone (SCT), a 501(c)(3) organization, is dedicated to assuring telephone access for people with speech disabilities. SCT has the support of several other organizations for this petition and which are listed as signatories below.

Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS)¹ contribute significantly to the independence of people with disabilities. FCC regulations for TRS² have been modernized many times over the past twenty years to incorporate new technologies and new approaches. Now is the time to modernize these regulations to assist, specifically, people with speech disabilities.

This Petition for Rulemaking concerns modernizing the current Speech-to-Speech (STS) form of relay service so that people with speech disabilities can also benefit from the fruits of Internet Protocol (IP) technology. We are proposing and asking for a rulemaking for Video Assisted STS (“VID-STS”). VID-STS has similar objectives to other relay services that are authorized by the FCC, that is, to provide functional equivalence to phone calls. We confirmed recently that there is some consumer support by posting a consumer petition which was signed by over 80 supporters within a one month period (see Appendix attached). These included potential users, family members and caretakers, allied medical professionals, government utility associates, and telephone industry associates.

Our Vision for VID-STS

SCT and others’ vision for VID-STS is that this would be a convergence of traditional Speech-to-Speech (STS) relay³ and the Internet-enabled form of relay known as Video Relay Service

¹ Title IV of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Pub. L. No. 101-336, § 401, 104 Stat.327, 366-69 (adding Section 225 to the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, 47 U.S.C. § 225.

² 47 C.F.R. § 64.601 - § 64.606, § 64.611, and § 64.613

³ 47 C.F.R. § 64.601 (a)(19).

(VRS). VRS, however, is defined for use only by sign language users.⁴ Like many VRS users, the consumer with a severe speech disability would have installed a high quality camera and microphone on his/her computer and, by means of a broadband Internet connection, would call a Communications Assistant (CA) with enhanced STS training and who has a video connection.

Such calls would work the same as traditional STS calls except that the VID-STS CA would be communicating with the user over the Internet with video input from a user who is not a sign language user. That CA or operator (“VID-STS CA”) would connect, place and voice telephone calls for the user, similar to the current process for STS, but with the addition of the video channel.

During these calls, the VID-STS CA would watch the user’s face and any available seen body parts or indicators, in addition to listening to the user’s voice. This is similar to the characteristics used in sign language (hand shape and hand location, orientation and movement, and facial expressions or other non-manual indicators). For people with speech disabilities who are not sign language users, location, orientation and movement of body, body parts and head, facial expression and other non-manual indicators, including some sound, can also add meaning that is translatable by the CA into clear speech that can be voiced to the person called.

That is, the video link allows the CA to view and interpret the conversation of the person with speech disabilities and voice the conversation back and forth with a voice caller, similar to the way a VRS CA interprets for sign language users.

Why VID-STS is Needed

VID-STS has the potential of being more useful to millions of Americans who have speech disabilities than does traditional STS. That is because many people with speech disabilities can only be understood if they can be seen by the person with whom they are communicating when making phone calls.⁵ Statistics on the number of people who can benefit from STS and from VID-STS are difficult to acquire. However, we uncovered the following data which provides a picture of the origin and scope of disabling conditions that may manifest with severe speech disability:

- Between 6 and 8 million people in the United States have some form of language impairment.⁶
- It is estimated that more than 3 million Americans stutter.⁷
- It is estimated that approximately 80,000 individuals acquire aphasia each year. About 1 million persons in the United States currently have aphasia.⁸

⁴ 47 C.F.R. § 64.601 (a)(26).

⁵ This may also be a reason why traditional STS is underutilized; there is insufficient communication information provided to the CA by the caller to enable a conversation.

⁶National Institute on Deafness and other Communication Disorders, at <http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/statistics/vsl.asp#2>

⁷ Idem.

⁸ Idem.

- Several studies suggest that 8 to 12 people per 1,000 experience severe communication impairments that require AAC.⁹
- Additionally, many people with the following conditions have moderate to severe speech disability and could benefit from VID-STS.
 - 500,000 people in the U.S. with Parkinson’s Disease¹⁰
 - 30,000 people in the U.S. with Huntington’s Disease¹¹
 - 30,000 people in the U.S. with Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), often referred to as "Lou Gehrig's Disease"¹²
 - 187,880 people in the U.S. with Spasmodic Dysphonia¹³
 - 300,000 people in the U.S. with cerebral palsy¹⁴
 - About one million people in the U.S. with Traumatic Brain Injury¹⁵, Centers for Disease Control, at http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/tbi_in_us_04/tbi_ed.htm

One goal of VID-STS would be to make this population more employable. SCT and others assert that people with speech disabilities face even more enormous barriers to employment than people with other disabilities. People with speech disabilities experience a high rate of unemployment since the ability to speak clearly over phone and other voice systems is necessary to apply for most jobs and to carry out the duties of those jobs. VID-STS would provide another consumer choice for people with severe speech disabilities to engage in work-related and other conversations on a more functionally equivalent basis with other speakers. For instance, another benefit of VID-STS might be to reduce the cost of disability benefits for this population nationwide if employment is facilitated by increased use of phone connection through VID-STS.

In addition to the benefits described above, VID-STS will provide access to emergency services to many people who do not have it now. Such access coincides with the FCC goal of making access to emergency services universal in the US.

VID-STS Aligns with New Communications Law

Allowing a regulatory change for VID-STS comports with the intent of a provision found in the new 21st Century Communications & Video Accessibility Act (“21st CVAA”) that modernizes and updates the definition of relay services.¹⁶ The new law permits different forms of relay to be connected and reimbursed with the intent of allowing users of different forms of relay to have phone calls with each other. For instance, traditional TTY users could connect with VRS users,

⁹ American Speech Language Hearing Association, at <http://www.asha.org/research/reports/aac.htm>

¹⁰ National Institute on Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS), at http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/parkinsons_disease/parkinsons_disease_backgrounder.htm

¹¹ NINDS, at http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/huntington/detail_huntington.htm#160493137

¹² ALS Association at <http://www.alsa.org/about-als/who-gets-als.html>

¹³ Movement Disorder Virtual University, at <http://www.mdvu.org/emove/article.asp?ID=1186>

¹⁴ NINDS, at

http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/cerebral_palsy/detail_cerebral_palsy.htm#154443104

¹⁵ Centers for Disease Control, at http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/pub-res/tbi_in_us_04/tbi_ed.htm

¹⁶ P.L. 111-260, Sec. 103. Relay Services.

HCO users could connect with captioned phone users, etc. This new provision not only permits greater functional equivalence for people with different speech and hearing disabilities through the interconnection of different forms of relay, but also recognizes how new technologies are converging and can be used to support the phone conversations of people with hearing and speech disabilities. Permitting “STS users to use VRS” aligns with this intent -- to allow the greatest use of TRS by all users with disabilities.

People with Speech Disabilities are Typically Not Sign Language Users

While people with speech disabilities can use VRS currently, it is only if they are sign language users. SCT and others assert that the majority of people with speech disabilities who are also people with hearing disabilities are not sign language users. The Commission should therefore adjust its regulation for VRS on this basis alone.

It would also be vastly unfair, arbitrary and capricious – not to mention physically impossible for most -- to require people with speech disabilities to learn Sign Language so that they can enjoy the benefits of VRS.

VID-STS and AAC Users

Many potential users of VID-STS communicate with an Augmentative and Alternative Communications Device (AAC device). AAC devices are tools to allow people with severe or significant speech impairments to express themselves. They are used as a tool to allow people with speech disabilities to say precisely what they want and as quickly as they can to be a valuable communicator, expressing their feelings, thoughts, and ideas and to ensure their needs are met. These devices can range from low tech picture cards to high end speech generating devices that connect with computers for better programming and other capabilities. Consumer and professional organizations are urging manufacturers of AAC devices to upgrade to be compatible to the advancing technologies of the 21st century and beyond.

There is a dearth of information about the number of AAC users. However, two types of individuals may benefit from the use of AAC systems: those with long-term communication impairments (e.g., dysarthria, aphasia, apraxia) and those with more temporary conditions (e.g., tracheostomy placement, intubation).¹⁷ Data on the use of AAC is not collected in any national census activity. To date, national searches to identify individuals who use AAC and are employed have identified only small numbers.¹⁸

Since AAC users typically have concomitant physical disabilities, such as if their speech disability results from cerebral palsy, stroke or other similar medical conditions, VID-STS would allow the CA to see both the consumer’s face and the device when an AAC device is used by the person with speech disability. The user would also have the option of feeding visual and even audio conversation information directly from their AAC device through their computer to the CA via their broadband Internet connection where such AAC devices permit such output. Such

¹⁷American Speech Language Hearing Association, at <http://www.asha.org/research/reports/aac.htm>

¹⁸ Idem.

information would further help the CA understand what people with significant speech disabilities are trying to communicate and which they would then voice to telephone call recipients.

SCT and other groups assert that one result of permitting VID-STS could be an increase in availability of Internet-access capable AAC devices. Unlike other people with speech disabilities, AAC users can be identified by manufacturers of their devices. SCT asserts that these manufacturers likely have a vested interest in increasing STS use by their customers, as such use could increase the likelihood of additional sales, particularly if such devices have Internet-based telephone access capability permitting access also to VID-STS.

However, SCT and others do not believe VID-STS should only work with users with specialized AAC devices. There may be mainstream devices that provide speaking functionality and that can augment the speech of people with severe speech disabilities. These should also be allowable during a VID-STS call. Likewise, VID-STS usage should not be contingent on users having an AAC device as an indicator of severity of speech disability for eligibility.

VID-STS Communications Assistants Would Also be STS Trained

This new form of STS would require additional training of current STS and/or VRS CAs. The training of CAs to be VID-STS CAs would increase greatly the amount of information that the CA would receive from the user, as compared to the amount of information a standard STS CA receives during relay service. That is, consumers with speech disabilities have indicated to SCT that in typical conversations, aspects such as gesture, facial expression, body language all help them to be understood. Current VRS CAs are familiar with this approach which can also benefit people with severe speech disabilities.

Likewise, all the existing mandatory minimum standards for CAs would continue to pertain, in addition to the allowed limited exceptions for STS CAs, such as retaining information from a particular call in order to facilitate the completion of consecutive calls, at the request of the user, where the caller requests the VID-STS CA retain such information, or where the VID-STS CA asks the caller if he or she wants the CA to repeat the same information during subsequent calls.

VID-STS CAs should be especially trained because understanding difficult speech requires capacities and attributes such as patience, familiarity with the culture and needs of people with speech disabilities and familiarity with speech pathology and linguistics. We would expect VID-STS CAs to also be allowed to work from home under similar guidelines as exist already for VRS interpreters. SCT and others assert that there is an embedded population of CAs in the TRS ecosystem who are familiar with plain old analog STS and who could become engaged in VID-STS.

Punos VID-STS Project in Finland Demonstrates Usefulness

Already in Finland, the Punos Project has demonstrated the usefulness of this form of relay service for people with speech disabilities. Trialed by the Honkalampisaatio Foundation, and funded by the Finnish Slot Machine Association, it ran from April 1 2009 until March 30, 2011. While we have been unable to access the Final Report of this project, referred to as the Braid

Project, we believe it may provide useful information in any rulemaking the Commission may pursue and we can provide further information on this project as it emerges.

Conclusion

SCT and other groups now ask the FCC to consider our petition promptly so as to authorize VID-STS as a form of VRS/TRS and reimburse providers for this service.

On behalf of millions of people who cannot voice clearly and who want functional equivalence in phone service,

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APPENDIX

LIST OF PEOPLE WHO SIGNED PETITION IN SUPPORT OF A NEW FORM OF SPEECH TO SPEECH (STS) RELAY, VIDEO STS

87 Allied medical professionals, family members and caregivers, potential users and others

Signatures collected over one month period.

ZIP CODE	EMAIL	CATEGORY	PERMISSION to share
91750	maryann.abbott@lausd.net	allied med professional	Yes
95062	pbarker@atole.com	allied med professional	Yes
92223	Fran.ed@verizon.net	allied med professional	Yes
93492	Barnonhill@aol.com	allied med professional	Yes
32308	corryl@leonschools.net	allied med professional	Yes
2140	eichleay@comcast.net	allied med professional	Yes
92127	b Fleming@ucpsd.org	allied med professional	Yes
94564-1501	libraj@comcast.net	allied med professional	Yes
95673	allanmfriedman@gmail.com	allied med professional	Yes
21561	bjg@drbjg.com	allied med professional	Yes
19147	amesgold@aol.com	allied med professional	Yes
94803	raygrott@hotmail.com	allied med professional	Yes
6880	Haugejm@aol.com	allied med professional	Yes
49525	mdhoffmann1@comcast.net	allied med professional	Yes
47906	djackson1991@gmail.com	allied med professional	Yes

49085	johnsonj@dnswm.org	allied med professional	Yes
27408	paula_justice@abss.k12.nc.us	allied med professional	Yes
21074	jkurtz@bcps.org	allied med professional	Yes
90065- 5236	jlawsonhealth.com	allied med professional	Yes
19144	leonhart@temple.edu	allied med professional	Yes
93001	alisha@dynamictherapysolutions.org	allied med professional	Yes
54321	johnvel@telus.net	allied med professional	Yes
11364	kelliemendonis@yahoo.com	allied med professional	Yes
85340	carmussel@cox.net	allied med professional	Yes
90045	jnahmanstouffer@empowertech.org	allied med professional	Yes
1966	ppandolfi@comcast.net	allied med professional	Yes
12054	epasquini@bcasd.neric.org	allied med professional	Yes
55108	rickp007@aol.com	allied med professional	Yes
75254	msvmsv@swbell.net	allied med professional	Yes
	katie@presencelearning.com	allied med professional	Yes
85382	mpress77@gmail.com	allied med professional	Yes
32312	radell@leonschools.net	allied med professional	Yes
93901	jramirez@cccil.org	allied med professional	Yes
85208	laurelrichardson@gmail.com	allied med professional	Yes
6250	chauncyrucker1@mac.com	allied med professional	Yes
16803	samuel@psu.edu	allied med professional	Yes
95126	jan@php.com	allied med professional	Yes
1002	Tuthill.Internet@comcast.net	allied med professional	Yes
85020	deannawagner@mac.com	allied med professional	Yes

85020	Gayle.Wiens@gmail.com	allied med professional	Yes
		family	
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		family	
94952	ix0chel@comcast.net	member/caretaker	Yes
		family	
60194	pblack00@gmail.com	member/caretaker	Yes
		family	
95819	kimberlycantrell@hotmail.com	member/caretaker	Yes
		family	
61761	kerryaconnolly@yahoo.com	member/caretaker	Yes
		family	
73601	Kaarol77@yahoo.com	member/caretaker	Yes
		family	
89523	Fuetsch1@sbcglobal.net	member/caretaker	Yes
		family	
6262	pherman3@charter.net	member/caretaker	Yes
		family	
92703	greatfulmomof4@yahoo.com	member/caretaker	Yes
		family	
89503	skg7754-mom@yahoo.com	member/caretaker	Yes
		family	
40604	lslee@fewpb.net	member/caretaker	Yes
		family	
91750	planetarypilgrim@yahoo.com	member/caretaker	Yes
		family	
95616	bonniecmm@sbcglobal.net	member/caretaker	Yes
		family	
24416	vamountainmomma@wmconnect.com	member/caretaker	Yes
		family	
98052	moraninsea@aol.com	member/caretaker	Yes

19149	Ronjr0676@verizon.net	family member/caretaker	Yes
48197	aorr@emich.edu	family member/caretaker	Yes
84058	s_stevepeters@hotmail.com	family member/caretaker	Yes
84058	alishap@provo.edu	family member/caretaker	Yes
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89502	crhuys@earthlink.net	family member/caretaker	Yes
63401	lutheran24@yahoo.com	family member/caretaker	Yes
60918	todd.shively@plantpioneer.com	family member/caretaker	Yes
80109	kt9702@yahoo.com	family member/caretaker	Yes
92399	wesandtracy_stevens@yahoo.com	family member/caretaker	Yes
70005	stokesps@bellsouth.net	family member/caretaker	Yes
90045	jnahmanstouffer@empowertech.org	family member/caretaker	Yes
78729	Morgaine108@yahoo.com	family member/caretaker	Yes
10033	ltsunsubscribe@nyc.rr.com	family member/caretaker	Yes
61107	mst85339@aol.com	family member/caretaker	Yes
7735	jvanhouten@optline.net	family	Yes

		member/caretaker	
80422	jean.walsh@ionsky.com	family member/caretaker	Yes
39175	rlw39175@yahoo.com	family member/caretaker	Yes
53593	jack.cassell@wisconsin.gov	government utility assoc	Yes
32940	frana.nancy@brevardschools.org	government utility assoc	Yes
32907	Joey10761@Yahoo.com	potential user	Yes
23227	robbinblankenship@gmail.com	potential user	Yes
95670	lisamariecooley@aol.com	potential user	Yes
95076	kferguson@ccil.org	potential user	Yes
94618	neiljacobson@yahoo.com	potential user	Yes
59808- 9333	ADAPTMT@aol.com	potential user	Yes
95035- 3613	Bobbi627@aol.com	potential user	Yes
94598	pinnock99@aol.com	potential user	Yes
38305	arareed151@gmail.com	potential user	Yes
7747	tobias@inclusive.com	potential user	Yes
80305	tim@cpwd.org	potential user	Yes
32312	mckinlesstrcy@yahoo.com	telephone Industry Associated	Yes

END