

In regard to the posting about restructuring the way VRS service providers are compensated and related issues. As an interpreting working for a service provider of Video Relay Service I have seen a decline in the quality of interpreters used by service providers in an attempt to save money. Unlike TTY teletype operators of the old model relay service, Sign Language Interpreting is a highly complex and difficult skill which is developed and proven through National Testing and Certification. Interpreters holding certification are at least minimally qualified to interpret. Interpreters without certification are unlikely to be able to consistently provide accurate service and therefore diminish the quality of interpretation, diminishing the "equality" we strive for the deaf community through the relay service. In the changes the FCC recommends there needs to be someone holding the ball on quality of service because it could be the difference between you getting the job or not when you make your call, losing money through misunderstandings, confusing your personal relations when interpretations are misunderstood. These are not uncommon circumstances.

As an interpreter in the video relay model I can share that it is perhaps one of the most difficult arenas to interpret in. In one moment you are voicing for a deaf person making a dental appointment, and in the next you are voicing for them as they are questioned regarding problems at work, financial endeavors, legal discussions, child protective services. There is no end to the variety, the significance and importance of these phone calls that come at an interpreter one after the other, for hours on end, with no context as a preparation, no chance to get to understand individual dialects or home signs. It is a complicated, difficult job to provide accurate service.

All the effort you put into trying to avoid misuse of funds, and streamlining services cannot be at the expense of quality of service. This is NOT TTY relay - which was never an effective form of communication for the deaf as so many deaf are not proficient in written English. Video Relay has the potential to be (and is) infinitely superior to TTY relay and has changed the lives of Deaf and Hard of Hearing people by giving them more real time access to their hearing counterparts via telephone. Don't let this golden service be diminished by cost cutting activities that compel companies to reduce pay to qualified interpreters forcing them out of the line of work and making VRS interpreters a beginning level position. This is not appropriate. Please pause and get feedback from your deaf community before moving too fast. Demand that the VRS providers use only certified interpreters. Your goal to provide equal access is undermined otherwise.

Thank you for your time.