

Chairman Genachowski,

CG Docket Nos. 03-123 and 10-51

I am writing in response to the FCC's request for comments on the "Structure and practices of the video relay service (VRS) program and on proposed VRS compensation rates." I am very concerned that the changes being considered will destroy a program that is vitally important to people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

I am not deaf, my parents are Deaf, I know firsthand how VRS works. VRS allows people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing to use the "phone" to communicate just like people who can hear. With VRS they can do the things we take for granted - make a doctor's appointment or call a child's school. VRS puts people who are deaf on a more level playing field.

The changes being considered by the FCC would undo much of this progress. VRS largely relies on highly skilled American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters. The FCC wants to drastically cut the rate they pay VRS companies for providing this service. Obviously, this will have an immediate and negative effect on the ability of VRS companies to employ and train qualified interpreters.

The FCC has also suggested that VRS can be just as effectively provided through government-mandated software that is used on off-the-shelf equipment like common videophones, computers, or tablets. Prior to the establishment of VRS services for the Deaf access to these devices was limited and the quality of products were not suitable for Deaf users. The marketplace did not support the use of these devices. I am concerned that this would lead to second class quality for the Deaf. While such equipment can provide a convenient backup solution, it can't replace the videophones and other technologies specifically designed to take into account the special needs of the deaf and hard-of-hearing.

I am also very concerned that the products available off the shelf may not support the immediate access to 911 services.

If the FCC takes away skilled ASL interpreters and innovative equipment, VRS as we know it today won't exist. This would be a huge step backward for the rights and opportunities of Americans who are deaf and hard-of-hearing.

The changes in service that are being suggested have me very concerned about the impact upon the access my parents have to clear communication. If the FCC takes away skilled ASL interpreters and innovative equipment, VRS as we know it today won't exist. This would be a huge step backward for the rights and opportunities of Americans who are deaf. Please help protect the rights of deaf Americans by preventing these proposed changes. Janet Estes