

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.

My mother, who has since passed away, was deaf and although I am not 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. I wish I had the opportunity to "talk to my Mom on the phone".

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. 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.

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. PLEASE don't take away this MILESTONE accomplished for our deaf and hard of hearing. If you could only see the joy on the face of a deaf parent OR child. Take a moment and just think of how you feel after you've hung up the phone from talking to your child away in college, or any loved one for that matter. Evangeline Uresti