

Chairman Genachowski,

CG Docket Nos. 03-123 and 10-51

I am writing to provide my comments on the FCC's Public Notice on the "Structure and practices of the video relay service (VRS) program and on proposed VRS compensation rates."

I am deaf and VRS is how I stay in touch with my family and friends who are not deaf. I'm sure hearing people don't think about what it means to be able to pick up the phone and call anyone any time or anywhere they want. But for me, this means everything. VRS has changed my life. I am losing my hearing and VRS allows me to be able to stay in touch with people and as a way to improve my ASL skills as there are few classes that I can afford to take.

VRS is a lifeline. It allows me to conduct business, connect with my family and friends and do many other things over the phone that many hearing people take for granted. Most important, though, VRS is how I access my local emergency 911 service. In an emergency I know that when I place a 911 call it will be answered immediately. My location will be known. And, specially trained American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters will be there to make sure my local emergency responders know exactly what help I need. You can't imagine how frightening it is to think that I might not be able to get help for me or my family because of long hold times, poorly trained interpreters, or bad equipment. I cannot make a call to 911 over a cell phone or even a regular house phone. I am unable to understand the questions that the operator or dispatcher is asking me. There is not a text based option for contacting 911 so if I need to contact them, I would use my VRS.

I am alarmed the FCC is proposing to dramatically change the VRS program. Why is the FCC going out of its way to fix something that isn't broken"

I think there are two crucial reasons to keep the current VRS system in place.

First, I like the company I do business with. I don't want to be forced to switch companies because the one I work with has gone out of business.

Second, I don't want to have to buy and set up my own VRS equipment. I got my equipment at no cost from my VRS provider. They installed it and continue to maintain it. It would be unfair to now shift this burden to me and other deaf people. If the government wants to prevent deaf people from connecting with others and using VRS, this is a good way to do it. I would be unable to continue to connect with other people outside my home if the equipment was not provided for me. It is beyond my means to afford all the necessary equipment and repairs if the equipment fails.

The VRS program works for people who are deaf. It's how we communicate every day with the

hearing world and how the hearing world communicates with us. Any changes to the program must be in the best interest of deaf Americans. The changes being considered by the FCC are not. I hope that you will help prevent these changes from taking place. Kathryn Ward