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CG Docket Nos. 03-123 and 10-51

FCC Mail Room

I am writing to you today as the wife of a user of VRS. My husband, who has been deaf since infancy, explained how limited his options were to connect to hearing people, before moving to this country. In Russia, there exists to this day the exact VRS climate your proposal will create. Deaf citizens there only have two options. They can purchase at a local retailer a piece of equipment similar to the US videophones, although with a far poorer image and transmission quality, averaging about \$300 (not including a television) (converted from Russian rubles) or they can travel to Moscow, and wait on lines to use a type of public-deaf videophone. Both are hard to come by. Not everyone lives in downtown Moscow, and most citizens are on a meager pension. There are only a handful of interpreters available because the industry can't even support sub-standard wage. The result is outlandish wait times, labored call management, to the degree that most deaf Russians do not even bother going to the trouble. Instead they depend on hearing household members to conduct business for them, or they settle into quiet resignation. They can't afford the \$300 device nor the monthly fee for the service. The result is that they are not equal citizens, not managing their own lives, and marginalized even further. They are still today in telecommunications where we were 50 years ago.

I am wondering if I could take this very story and tell it a year from now to someone here in the US, only leaving out the name of the country, would we be speaking of the United States? The United States with values based on equality for all humans? *The* leader for democracy in the world? Deaf Russian citizens have pleaded for decades to have the equivalent of the ADA. We are pioneers of the concept of 'functional equivalence'. Yet your proposal of a deprivatization of the VRS industry will sadly put to waste all our progress.

Clarity of image and accessibility are the key elements to the transmission of a signed language. A visual gestural language requires the best products to capture every nuance of its grammar. We who can speak and hear English are privileged with so many phone choices; in fact, we are gluttons. Why should our deaf loved ones not be offered just as equal an experience? My husband trusts the VRS companies to keep creating better videophones and applications because they employ deaf innovators; they listen to what deaf consumers need, and they follow through. From something as mundane as ordering takeout to arranging legal services, VRS is an integral part of our lives as a hearing-deaf couple. I support the fact that his videophone is given to him free of charge from his VRS provider, along with every maintenance service for it to operate properly. My husband is mobile and as his communication needs grow, so does the innovation.

I can't imagine my husband's ability to update me of my mother's condition being hindered by poorly managed VRS service, intermittent service, or interpreters who can't adequately convey his expressions properly to our daughters' teachers at school. I can't imagine his once again

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having to turn to me, his *hearing* partner, or our children to do the interpreting due to frustration with standardized, off-the-shelf product.

I urge you to listen very attentively to what deaf consumers are explaining to you they need in order to be equal citizens under the ADA, learn from the histories of other nations, from which we boastfully distinguish ourselves, of how dismantling of the VRS industry in the manner you have proposed, would fly in the face of all we represent. Think of those like my husband, who graciously embraced the American dream after decades of enduring lack of access to communication, and consider a modest, realistic revision that takes into account facts of accessibility as explained by deaf people, who are themselves the number one stakeholders.

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Weisenberg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'J'.