

I am deaf or hard-of-hearing and use Video Relay Service (VRS) every day to stay connected with friends and family. I cannot imagine life without this critical service that I enjoy.

I do not want the proposals included in the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) Public Notice implemented! If they were, I am concerned that my communication needs would not be met.

I am not in favor of the FCC's proposals to mandate that I use "off-the-shelf" equipment and government-required software. I like the fact the equipment I currently use was designed for my needs as a deaf person who uses American Sign Language. I do not like the FCC's proposal that I be required to change the equipment I currently use. I also want to be able to choose a VRS service provider based on service that best meets my needs. I want this choice!

I am not in favor of the suggested changes in the Public Notice. Instead, the FCC needs to preserve my right to choose.

I am also writing in response to the Federal Communication Commission's (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 about these proposals and how they will affect my family's safety.

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.

Cutting the rates paid to VRS providers as low as the FCC proposes will only reduce the service quality I currently depend on. How will these companies hire and keep skilled ASL interpreters on staff when the government is proposing dramatic cuts to their compensation? How will 911 calls be answered immediately when there are fewer interpreters and longer hold times? How will I know that my VRS will work when I'm using a videophone from WalMart instead of the specially designed videophone from my VRS provider?

I hope the FCC has answers to all of the questions before it considers changing the current system.