

Dear FCC,

PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE do not cut funding for the video relay service (VRS).

As a deaf person I know from experience that VRS service is critical and essential to the deaf and hearing impaired community. Any type of funding cuts could dramatically impact VRS providers and possibly force them out of business which would force the deaf and hard of hearing community to revert back to old, antiquated, and non-user friendly communication equipment such as TTY's. In addition to being outdated and antiquated companies that claim to offer TTY as a communication option really don't, including government agencies. If you don't believe me try calling Social Security by TTY and see how long you sit on hold. I tried it once, was on hold for over 45 minutes before I became frustrated and hung up. In addition, if you are using a TTY and an automated service answers you don't receive the prompt that tells you to press option 1, 2 or 3 and then you are stuck in the phone system unable to proceed. This is easily resolved by using a VRS provider who can call and have a response within minutes.

VRS offers the ability for deaf and hard of hearing users to be more independent and communicate with the hearing world. It allows us to schedule appointments, communicating with other hearing individuals who do not know sign. The ability for the deaf and hard of hearing community to SEE who they are talking to and what is being said is critical. As a hearing individual can you imagine communicating your entire life by text message only? Budget cuts to VRS could force the deaf world back to that era, an era where miscommunication and misunderstandings would occur on a regular basis.

Many, many deaf individuals working for VRS providers are innovators who help develop, improve and implement VRS services and technology and provide critical feedback to improve VRS services that are often overlooked or not identified by the hearing world. Much of the technology developed by deaf individuals is then borrowed and utilized by the hearing community to also improve technical communication in the hearing world. Any program cuts would cause the loss of talented deaf individuals who contribute on a technological level as well as negatively impact the economy by loss of employment.

Additional negative impacts of any funding cuts to VRS are deaf individuals who are cut off from friends, family and the community. Deaf and hard of hearing individuals have been forced to live in two separate worlds, the deaf world and the hearing world unlike those who are blind or physically disabled who can still hear and talk. The ability to communicate is critical for individuals, businesses and educational providers.

The ability to sign AND understand sign is the very basic critical element of the deaf world. This cannot be taught without visual technological ability. It must be seen and VRS allows this to happen. When an idea, thought or feeling wants or needs to be communicated it is primarily done so by spoken voice. The deaf do not have this ability which further emphasizes the importance of visual sign language. In addition, VRS allows deaf and hard of hearing individuals the ability to break through the communication barrier and live, work and participate in the hearing world which makes them feel less isolated and forgotten about.

We are all American's and we should all have the same opportunities to communicate with each other in a way that is easily accessed and understood by everyone. A key element to help accomplish this is by having highly qualified interpreters. Any funding cuts would put these skilled positions at risk which could result in miscommunication and misunderstandings not to mention a high level of frustration by those who depend on this service.

I realize that our government is in a situation where budget cuts need to be made but I respectfully ask that funding not be cut from the VRS that provides critical services to the deaf and hard of hearing population.

Thank you,

Lynn Losee