

Chairman Genachowski,

I am writing to urge you not to cut VRS services. Deaf and DeafBlind people depend on VRS to communicate with their hearing friends, family members, employers, and to make other essential calls needed to conduct their daily lives. In this way, VRS has provided us with significant opportunity for access, connection, and independence. The loss of VRS services would result in limited opportunities and isolation.

VRS also plays an important role in employment. To make inquiries over the phone regarding one's employment, or to communicate with one's workplace, is a simple task for hearing individuals. The Seattle Lighthouse for the Blind employs many Deaf and DeafBlind people in positions ranging from assembly to administration to IT. To deprive them of access to telephone communication by removing VRS would be to deprive them of access to current or future job opportunities.

There is also a gap for callers who are DeafBlind and so unable to see the screen to use VRS. To address this gap, we request that you consider funding for Communication Facilitators (CF). A Communication Facilitator (CF) is a skilled signer (usually a Deaf person) who acts as a bridge between the DeafBlind person and the video screen. A CF copies sign language from the screen of a videophone and relays it to the DeafBlind person using tactile sign language (a signing process that is understood via touch, not vision).

Thank you for your consideration of these points, and of your support towards maintaining a high standard of quality in the VRS services provided in the United States, where we value the success of the individual, and equal access for all.

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