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VIDEO RELAY SERVICE (VRS) PROVIDERS EXPRESS DISAPPOINTMENT WITH FCC ORDER LOWERING COMPENSATION RATES; CALL FOR IMMEDIATE ISSUANCE OF NPRM ON JOINT PROVIDER PROPOSAL TO IMPROVE SERVICE, EXPAND OFFERINGS, AND UPHOLD ADA'S PROMISE OF FUNCTIONALLY EQUIVALENT TELECOMMUNICATION SERVICES

WASHINGTON D.C. – June 30, 2015 – The six U.S. providers of Video Relay Service (VRS) said today's FCC order regarding the rates paid for telecommunication relay services is a missed opportunity to improve Video Relay Service (VRS), expand its offerings, and uphold the Americans with Disabilities Act's promise of functionally equivalent telecommunication services for people who are deaf and hard-of-hearing. They called for the immediate issuance of a notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) and an expedited comment and decision process on a proposal they submitted to the Commission earlier this year.

Among other things, today's order implements a decrease in the compensation rates paid to VRS providers. This is the fifth rate cut since June 2013, significantly affecting the ability of providers to continue to provide the highest quality VRS. The six providers - [ASL Services](#), [CAAG](#), [CONVO](#), [Purple Communications](#), [Sorenson Communications](#), and [ZVRS](#) – presented the FCC with a [Joint Proposal](#) in April to make significant enhancements to their services in exchange for freezing their compensation rates prior to the scheduled July 1 rate reduction.

The FCC has not yet put the Joint Proposal out for comment and did not consider it in the current rate order despite the fact that it has the support of the major consumer groups representing deaf Americans, nine of which filed a [letter](#) with the FCC regarding the benefits of the proposed enhanced VRS service, as well as the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), which similarly expressed their [support](#) to the FCC. Although the FCC may yet seek comment, VRS providers must continue to plan for future rate reductions – which means continuing to cut costs in advance.

The fact that all VRS stakeholders support the Joint Proposal signals its significance as well as the seriousness of the situation facing VRS. The providers maintain that the FCC's rate schedule – in place since 2013 and which will continue to lower rates through January 2017 – is not sustainable and risks the very viability of the industry. As the compensation rates go down, the providers face increasing financial difficulty meeting FCC requirements, providing quality service and, ultimately, staying in business. They have called for a "time out" so that the FCC can develop and adopt a rational rate-setting methodology. The Joint Proposal seeks a freeze of the VRS compensation rates at their pre-July 1 level, while also proposing to adopt faster speed-of-answer requirements and implement enhancements of service that are important to the deaf community, including a trial of skills-based call routing and encouraging the provision of deaf interpreters when needed.

VRS is the primary technology used by the deaf community who rely on sign language to communicate over the telephone with people who are hearing. With VRS, a person who is deaf uses a videophone or a mobile application to communicate with a hearing person over the phone through an interpreter. The interpreter speaks to the hearing person and communicates using ASL with the person who is deaf. The

introduction of high-quality VRS in the early 2000s has been transformational in the lives of people who are deaf and has helped level the playing field for many. Dr. I King Jordan, the first deaf president of Gallaudet University, recently wrote in an [op-ed](#), “Perhaps the most significant change in my life has been my ability to use the telephone.... For deaf people like me, VRS is truly one of the great success stories of the Americans with Disabilities Act.”

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