

ROBERT F. BENNETT  
UTAH

COMMITTEES:  
APPROPRIATIONS  
BANKING, HOUSING, AND  
URBAN AFFAIRS  
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
HOMELAND SECURITY AND  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION  
JOINT ECONOMIC

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4403  
(202) 224-5444

May 24, 2010

Honorable Julius Genachowski, Chairman  
Commissioner Michael J. Copps  
Commissioner Robert M. McDowell  
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn  
Commissioner Meredith Attwell Baker  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 Twelfth Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554

*CB*  
*ADA*  
*PI*  
*JG*  
*930*

Dear Chairman Genachowski and Commissioners Copps, McDowell, Clyburn and Baker,

I am writing to urge you to set a fair and predictable rate for Video Relay Services ("VRS"). As you are aware, VRS is a broadband-based relay service that enables deaf individuals in Utah and throughout the country to communicate in real time in their own language, American Sign Language ("ASL"). Deaf individuals often describe VRS as life-altering and many deaf Americans have come to rely heavily on VRS to place calls to hearing individuals. It is not only a critically important service in and of itself, but VRS is also driving broadband adoption among the deaf – where broadband adoption has otherwise lagged.

In Title IV of the ADA, Congress requires that the FCC promote efficiency, improved technology, nationwide access, and functional equivalence for the deaf. Because VRS is generally considered the most functionally equivalent form of relay service available today, it is essential that the Commission establish a fair and predictable rate for VRS that promotes these goals.

I am concerned that the Commission's April 30<sup>th</sup> rate proposals do not include many of the real costs of providing VRS. The Commission voted unanimously three years ago for a multi-year, incentive-based rate plan. That plan encouraged investment, innovation, and efficiency and helped avoid protracted and contentious debates about costs. The April 30<sup>th</sup> rate proposals seem to reverse course and look to adopt a cost-based system that does not include all of the true costs. I worry that the Commission's actions could undo recent progress toward functional equivalence. The results would likely be devastating – in terms of jobs lost and the communications services available to the deaf community.

The nation's leading VRS provider, Sorenson Communications, Inc., is headquartered in the State of Utah and represents a true American success story. Sorenson was founded by a Utah

7 JUN 2010 RCUD

family in 1995 and began providing VRS in 2003. While it was not the first provider of VRS, the company has grown by providing excellent and innovative service to deaf individuals. Sorenson now employs almost 800 Utah residents and about 5,700 individuals throughout the country and is one of the nation's largest private sector employers of deaf individuals. The Commission's April 30<sup>th</sup> rate proposals have put these jobs and the vital service VRS providers offer to deaf individuals in jeopardy.

Without VRS providers like Sorenson, members of the deaf community would be forced to resort to typing over TTYs (typewriter-like machines) to call 911, doctors, neighbors, family members, or friends – a slow, tedious, and frustrating experience. This would be a step back in the path to functional equivalence.

I urge you to adopt a VRS rate that is fair and predictable. The rate you set should encourage the innovation and advancements that have made VRS the preferred method of communication for the deaf. VRS is a success of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and I urge you to ensure that progress in communications for the deaf continues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert F. Bennett". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "R" and "B".

Robert F. Bennett  
United States Senator