

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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August 10, 2015

The Honorable Tom Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

We write to express concern that the cuts in compensation rates set in motion by the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) June 2013 Order threaten the viability of Video Relay Service (VRS) for the deaf and hard of hearing. Through VRS, deaf Americans can communicate telephonically using American Sign Language rather than typed text. VRS providers warn that as rates continue to ratchet down, service quality and innovation could deteriorate, and some providers may be forced to leave the market. This is similar to what happened when the FCC cut rates for IP Relay. Therefore, we urge the Commission to freeze VRS compensation rates across all tiers until it implements a market-based compensation methodology, which we hope the FCC will develop and implement as quickly as possible.

We understand that the FCC may be considering a freeze in Tier 1 compensation rates. A Tier 1 freeze is a small step in the right direction, but falls short of improving the service in a meaningful way. Tier 1 minutes comprise less than 16 percent of all minutes provided, and those rates are already approximately \$1 (or 25 percent) more per minute than Tier 3 rates. Tier 3 covers over 70 percent of VRS. Accordingly, we are concerned that allowing compensation rates to decline in Tier 3 will continue to have an adverse impact on service to the deaf and hard of hearing.

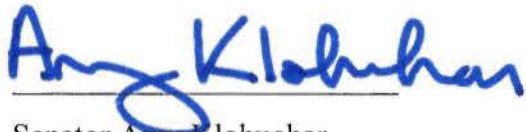
It is our understanding that all six U.S. VRS providers recently presented the FCC with a proposal to enhance and preserve this service. We understand that their proposal would increase the speed with which calls are answered, improve interoperability among providers, and test new service offerings—while preventing the deterioration of the service by freezing the rates paid to VRS providers across all tiers. The major deaf consumer groups and the organization representing American Sign Language interpreters support the VRS providers' proposal and have filed letters with the FCC to that effect.

The FCC has committed to reforming the compensation methodology for VRS, and we urge the Commission to take swift action on the development of and transition to this new market-based methodology.

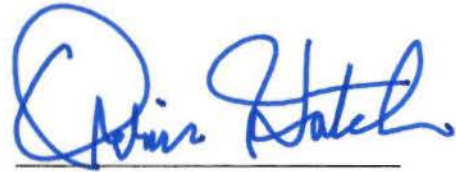
However, until the Commission implements such a market-based compensation methodology, we urge the Commission to prevent the deterioration of VRS quality and innovation by freezing compensation rates across all tiers.

We appreciate your prompt attention to this request.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Amy Klobuchar in blue ink, written over a horizontal line.

Senator Amy Klobuchar

Handwritten signature of Orrin G. Hatch in blue ink, written over a horizontal line.

Senator Orrin G. Hatch

Handwritten signature of Michael S. Lee in blue ink, written over a horizontal line.

Senator Michael S. Lee

Handwritten signature of Shelley Moore Capito in blue ink, written over a horizontal line.

Senator Shelley Moore Capito