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For Immediate Release

FCC ACTS TO IMPROVE VIDEO RELAY SERVICE TO HELP AMERICANS WITH HEARING AND SPEECH DISABILITIES
Agency Makes Policy Changes to Help VRS Customers Make Informed Choices, Connect with Specialize Interpreters and Connect with Hearing People

WASHINGTON, March 23, 2017 – The Federal Communications Commission today approved new rules to improve the quality and efficiency of video relay services. Video relay services (VRS) enable people who are deaf, hard-of-hearing and speech disabled to make calls over broadband through intermediaries using American Sign Language and a videophone.

These changes respond to requests from VRS users for improved relay services – and a more robust marketplace of service providers – that are functionally equivalent to those available to hearing individuals. Specific provisions of the new rules include:

- **Specialized Interpreters:** The FCC authorizes, on a trial basis, routing VRS calls that require the use of legal, medical, and computer support terminology to interpreters who have special skills in interpreting these technical conversations, and bringing in qualified deaf interpreters to help on calls from people with limited ability in signing or comprehension.
- **Comparison Shopping for VRS Companies:** The FCC will begin taking action to publish providers' speed-of-response history to help consumers make informed choices when shopping among providers. The FCC will also explore the development of new service quality data to help consumers make informed choices.
- **Direct Video Calls with Hearing People:** Video phone numbers will be made available to hearing people who know American Sign Language, so they can have direct-dialed video calls with deaf consumers.
- **At-Home Interpreting:** The Order authorizes a pilot program for VRS calls to be handled from home-based work stations under strict requirements to maintain call quality and confidentiality.

An accompanying Notice of Inquiry seeks comment on measuring VRS quality through performance metrics, and how to address certain calls made to VRS communication assistants that may not be legitimate.

The Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, also adopted today, proposes a four-year plan for VRS provider compensation rates, asks about the appropriateness of non-service related giveaways by providers and interpreter exclusivity contracts, and seeks comment on whether the

TRS Fund should set aside amounts for research and development designed to improve VRS. It also proposes a more efficient means of routing VRS and video calls and seeks to improve how VRS calls made from enterprise and public phones are validated to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse. Lastly, this proposal would permit business and government customer support centers to enter telephone numbers in the separate telecommunications relay service numbering directory so that VRS users can communicate directly in sign language with service representatives working in these centers.

With the steps taken today, the Commission reaffirms its commitment to ensuring equal access to the benefits of communications technology is available to consumers with disabilities.

Action by the Commission March 23, 2017 by Report and Order, Notice of Inquiry, Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, and Order (FCC 17-26). Chairman Pai, Commissioners Clyburn and O’Rielly approving and issuing separate statements.

CG Docket No. 10-5; CG Docket No. 03-123

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