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For Immediate Release

FCC PERMITS AT-HOME CALL HANDLING BY SIGN-LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS FOR VIDEO RELAY SERVICE

Safeguards Included for Service Quality, Confidentiality, and Fraud Protection as Part of Decision to Make the Pilot Program Permanent

WASHINGTON, January 30, 2020—The Federal Communications Commission today authorized compensating video relay service (VRS) providers for calls handled by sign language interpreters working from home. This initiative aims to expand the number of qualified individuals willing to work as communications assistants to help facilitate video calls for persons with hearing or speech disabilities who use American Sign Language.

VRS is a Telecommunications Relay Service Fund-supported program that enables persons with hearing or speech disabilities who use American Sign Language to communicate with voice telephone users through video equipment and interpretation by a trained professional. The VRS user and the communications assistant can see and communicate with each other in signed conversation.

Approval of the new rules makes permanent at-home call handling for video relay service after a two-year pilot program demonstrated that allowing sign language interpreters to work at home under appropriate safeguards can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the program without causing discernible harm to service quality or user confidentiality. The new rules adopted by the Commission include clear requirements to ensure quality and confidentiality, as well as prevent waste, fraud, and abuse.

The Commission's action will improve this vital accessibility service in multiple ways, including:

- **Recruiting Interpreters**—The added flexibility of home workstations will enable VRS providers to attract and retain qualified sign-language interpreters for whom working at the companies' call centers is not a practical option.
- **Improved Service**—Working at home may reduce staff stress and improve productivity and performance. Participating VRS providers have consistently reported that the average at-home communications assistant handles more calls daily and has a comparable or lower ratio of complaints to answered calls than the average call center employee.
- **Reliability**—At-home call handling can help providers to maintain staffing levels during weather emergencies that affect workers' ability to reach a call center.

- **Reduced Costs**—Providers may be able to reduce the need for facilities and related overhead costs, a potential cost savings in TRS Fund expenditures.

Action by the Commission January 30, 2020 by Report and Order (FCC 20-7). Chairman Pai, Commissioners O’Rielly, Carr, Rosenworcel, and Starks approving. Chairman Pai, Commissioners O’Rielly, Carr, and Starks issuing separate statements.

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