

**STATEMENT OF
ACTING CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities*, CG Docket No. 03-123; *Structure and Practices of the Video Relay Services Program*, CG Docket No. 10-51.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, functional equivalency is the foundation of our telecommunications relay service policies. Functional equivalency may sound like lingo only a lawyer could love. But for millions of Americans, it means they have the ability to reach out, connect, and participate more fully in the world. And for those who are deaf and hard-of-hearing, having access to functionally equivalent services means having access to video relay service—or VRS.

The way VRS works is simple. A person using sign language signs over a video call to a specially trained Communications Assistant. The Communications Assistant interprets the sign language and relays it to the person on the other end of the call. When the caller speaks, the Communications Assistant signs the response back to the person using sign language.

If the service is relatively straightforward, the compensation system that supports it is anything but. The companies providing this service are paid by the Telecommunications Relay Services Fund, administered by the Federal Communications Commission. For years, the agency has tried to set rates that permit providers of VRS to cover their costs while also promoting consumer choice and competition. The result is a three-tiered system that compensates providers based on their monthly volume of VRS traffic.

It has been more than four years since the FCC last considered compensation policy for VRS. Since that time, there have been changes in technology and the marketplace and a global pandemic that has challenged our assumptions and projections about who will use this service and how often.

So it's the right time to refresh our thinking. That's what this effort is about today. We ask what the compensation system should look like going forward and what needs changing. We ask if our current tiers get it right or if they should be adjusted. For example, we seek comment on updating the current rates and ask questions if our existing volumetric break points used to differentiate rate tiers continue to make sense. On top of this, we ask if in light of the pandemic it even makes sense to make big changes to our cost structure right now. Finally, to give commenters plenty of time to provide their thoughts and ideas, we've decided to extend the current compensation system through the end of this year.

A special thank you to the Disability Rights Office for their commitment to functional equivalency and to all of the staff responsible for today's effort. From the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau that's Bob Aldrich, Diane Burstein, Eliot Greenwald, Halie Peacher, Michael Scott, Bill Wallace, and Patrick Webre; from the Office of Economics and Analytics that's Susan Lee, Virginia Metallo, Eric Ralph, and Emily Talaga; from the Office of General Counsel that's Terry Cavanaugh, Richard Mallen, and Bill Richardson; and from the Office of Managing Director, that's Andrew Mulitz and Dave Schmidt.