

CLEAR **2** CONNECT

WHAT IS VIDEO RELAY SERVICE (VRS)?

VRS is a form of Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) that enables a person who uses American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate with a hearing person using a telephone.

HOW DOES VIDEO RELAY SERVICE WORK?

Through a videophone, webcam, or mobile application, a deaf person establishes a visual connection with a sign language interpreter. The interpreter then places a call to the hearing person that the deaf person wishes to speak with and facilitates a conversation, interpreting what the hearing person says to the deaf person and voicing what the deaf person signs in reply. A version of VRS called Voice Carry Over (VCO) is the same except that a deaf person can choose to speak instead of sign.

WHO OVERSEES THE PROVISION OF VIDEO RELAY SERVICE?

The Federal Communications Commission oversees VRS, which is funded by a small charge on American consumer phone bills and is available at no extra cost to Americans with hearing disabilities.

WHY IS ACCESS TO VIDEO RELAY SERVICE AT RISK?

In recent years, VRS technology has not kept pace with the advancements we've seen in telecommunications for hearing Americans and the quality of service has diminished significantly. For instance, wait time between entering a phone number and being connected to an interpreter has increased, while the quality of interpreting has decreased. This isn't just an inconvenience for VRS users; it can be potentially dangerous. VRS—and the quality of its service—can be critical, even lifesaving, when it comes to communication for health care and emergency situations.

HOW CAN WE PROTECT ACCESS TO VIDEO RELAY SERVICE?

A lack of VRS innovation is furthering the “digital divide” for many Americans with hearing disabilities. VRS is vital not only for hundreds of thousands of Americans who are deaf, but also for millions of their hearing friends and family, colleagues, and community members. Under Title IV of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Americans who experience a hearing and/or speech disability have a right to access telecommunications services that are “functionally equivalent” to those used by consumers without these types of disabilities. To meet this requirement, the FCC must evaluate the current state of VRS and implement VRS reform that provides for continual modernization to ensure quality service.

Join the Clear2Connect Coalition in advocating to protect the right for people with hearing disabilities to access the safe, effective technology they need to communicate.

To learn more and take action, visit our website at www.Clear2Connect.org.