



PUBLIC NOTICE

Federal Communications Commission
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COMMENT SOUGHT ON REQUEST BY U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE TO ALLOW INTERNATIONAL VRS CALLS TO U.S. EMBASSIES AND CONSULATES

CG Docket Nos. 03-123 and 10-51

Comments Due: December 6, 2024

Reply Comments Due: December 16, 2024

The U.S. Department of State (State Department) seeks to improve the ability of U.S. citizens who are deaf or hard of hearing to reach its dedicated consular teams while traveling overseas.¹ The State Department requests that the Federal Communications Commission (Commission) waive its rules to the extent necessary to allow Video Relay Service (VRS) users to call U.S. embassies and consulates while traveling abroad.² We seek comment on this request.

The Commission has previously ruled that no compensation is available from the Interstate Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS) Fund for VRS calls where both endpoints of the call are outside the United States.³ Recognizing that the Commission may need to waive certain rules to allow such calls to be compensated from the TRS Fund, the State Department asks the Commission “to whitelist official State Department telephone numbers to authorize VRS providers to connect calls to U.S. embassies and consulates worldwide without restrictions.”⁴ The State Department explains that its “dedicated consular teams around the world stand ready to assist, and our embassies and consulates maintain duty rosters to coordinate help on a 24/7 basis, for U.S. residents who need assistance due to a medical emergency, lost passport, death, arrest, or other unanticipated event.”⁵ The State Department seeks to ensure that individuals who use VRS have access to these services as part of its Deaf Diplomacy initiative to expand “understanding and inclusion within the Department as well as in our inclusion and outreach efforts to the U.S. citizens we serve.”⁶

¹ See Letter from Rena Bitter, Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of State, to Jessica Rosenworcel, Chairwoman, FCC (filed Sept. 23, 2024), <https://www.fcc.gov/ecfs/document/10923573719951/1> (State Department Request).

² *Id.*

³ See *Structure and Practices of the Video Relay Service Program*, CG Docket No. 10-51, Declaratory Ruling, 25 FCC Rcd 1868, 1872, para. 9 (2010) (“VRS calls that both originate and terminate outside the United States are not compensable from the Fund under section 225.”); see also 47 CFR § 64.604(d)(6) (restricting TRS Fund compensation for VRS calls originating from international IP addresses); *Structure and Practices of the Video Relay Service Program*, CG Docket No. 10-51, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 26 FCC Rcd 5545, 5564, para. 32 (2011).

⁴ State Department Request.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

Filing Requirements. Interested parties may file comments on or before the dates indicated above.⁷ All filings must reference CG Docket Nos. 03-123 and 10-51. Comments may be filed using the Commission's Electronic Comment Filing System (ECFS).⁸

- Electronic Filers: Comments may be filed electronically using the Internet by accessing the ECFS: <https://www.fcc.gov/ecfs/filings>.
- Paper Filers:
 - Parties who choose to file by paper must file an original and one copy of each filing.
 - Filings can be sent, by commercial overnight courier, or by first-class or overnight U.S. Postal Service mail. All filings must be addressed to the Commission's Secretary, Office of the Secretary, Federal Communications Commission.
 - Hand-delivered or messenger-delivered paper filings for the Commission's Secretary are accepted between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. by the FCC's mailing contractor at 9050 Junction Drive, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701. All hand deliveries must be held together with rubber bands or fasteners. Any envelopes and boxes must be disposed of before entering the building.
 - Commercial courier deliveries (any deliveries not by the U.S. Postal Service Express) must be sent to 9050 Junction Drive, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701.
 - U.S. Postal Service first-class, Express, and Priority mail must be sent to 45 L Street, NE, Washington, DC 20554.

Ex Parte Rules. The proceeding this Notice initiates shall be treated as a "permit-but-disclose" proceeding in accordance with the Commission's *ex parte* rules.⁹ Persons making *ex parte* presentations must file a copy of any written presentation or a memorandum summarizing any oral presentation within two business days after the presentation (unless a different deadline applicable to the Sunshine period applies). Persons making oral *ex parte* presentations are reminded that memoranda summarizing the presentation must (1) list all persons attending or otherwise participating in the meeting at which the *ex parte* presentation was made, and (2) summarize all data presented and arguments made during the presentation. If the presentation consisted in whole or in part of the presentation of data or arguments already reflected in the presenter's written comments, memoranda or other filings in the proceeding, the presenter may provide citations to such data or arguments in his or her prior comments, memoranda, or other filings (specifying the relevant page and/or paragraph numbers where such data or arguments can be found) in lieu of summarizing them in the memorandum. Documents shown or given to Commission staff during *ex parte* meetings are deemed to be written *ex parte* presentations and must be filed consistent with rule 1.1206(b). In proceedings governed by rule 1.49(f) or for which the Commission has made available a method of electronic filing, written *ex parte* presentations and memoranda summarizing oral *ex parte* presentations, and all attachments thereto, must be filed through the electronic comment filing system available for that proceeding, and must be filed in their native format (*e.g.*, .doc, .xml, .ppt, searchable .pdf). Participants in this proceeding should familiarize themselves with the Commission's *ex parte* rules.

People with Disabilities. To request materials in accessible formats for people with disabilities (Braille, large print, electronic files, audio format), send an e-mail to fcc504@fcc.gov or call the Bureau at 202-418-0530 (voice).

⁷ See 47 CFR §§ 1.1, 1.49.

⁸ *Electronic Filing of Documents in Rulemaking Proceedings*, GC Docket No. 97-113, Report and Order, 13 FCC Rcd 11322 (1998).

⁹ 47 CFR §§ 1.1200 *et seq.*

Additional Information. For further information regarding this Notice, please contact William Wallace, Disability Rights Office, Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, at 202-418-2716 or by e-mail to William.Wallace@fcc.gov.

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