



NEWS

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.
See *MCI v. FCC*, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).

For Immediate Release:
May 3, 2006

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FCC DECLARES VIDEO RELAY SERVICE (VRS) PROVIDERS MUST PROVIDE INTEROPERABILITY WITH COMPETING PROVIDERS

Commission Also Asks for Comment on How Hearing Callers Can Reach VRS Providers And On Whether Speech Internet Protocols Should Be Adopted for VRS Equipment.

In response to a petition by the California Coalition of Agencies Serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the FCC has found that all VRS consumers must be able to place a VRS call through any VRS provider's service, and all VRS providers must be able to receive calls from, and make calls to, any VRS consumer. The Commission also determined that restricting the use of a provider's VRS service so that consumers cannot access other VRS providers is inconsistent with the functional equivalency mandate, the public interest and the intent of Congress.

VRS is a form of the Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) that enables persons who use American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate with voice telephone users. Video equipment links the VRS user with a relay operator – called a “communications assistant” (CA) – so that the VRS user and the CA can see and communicate with each other in ASL. The CA translates the signed language into spoken language for the hearing party on the call. Because of its speed, VRS has become an enormously popular form of TRS.

In its *Declaratory Ruling*, the Commission declared it inconsistent with the notion of functional equivalency to require VRS consumers to have multiple sets of equipment to be connected to multiple providers. It noted that public safety concerns are raised when a consumer has VRS equipment that can be used only with one provider's service.

In an accompanying *Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking*, the Commission asked for comment on the creation of an open and global database of proxy numbers for VRS consumers, so that that a hearing person may call a VRS consumer more easily. The Commission also asked for comment on whether it should adopt specific Internet protocols or standards to ensure interoperability.

Action by the Commission May 3, 2006, by Declaratory Ruling and NPRM (FCC 06-57). Chairman Martin, Commissioners Copps, Adelstein and Tate with separate statements being issued by Chairman Martin and Commissioners Copps, Adelstein and Tate

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