

Good afternoon delegates of the CRTC and chairman Blais. My name is Ava Hawkins

As a member of the Deaf community, I am identified as a CODA (Child of Deaf Adults) as well as a certified interpreter. I have much experience with the Deaf community as I come from 8 generations of Deaf family members. For the first portion of my presentation I will sign, then later on I will present in spoken English.

Today, I will present on four various points which clarify my views on why we need VRS. - Life experiences, social needs, modernization and equal rights.

First, I'd like to give you a glimpse of what it's like growing up in the Deaf community and how we communicate with our Deaf parents.

I was raised with Deaf parents and have Deaf siblings as well, in Winnipeg, Manitoba; however, I reside in Vancouver, British Columbia now. My father's side of the family was all Deaf and we communicated using sign language. When I was about 5 years old, my father gave me a present. It was in a small brown box. I opened up and it was a rotary dial black telephone with the 10 round rings that you put your finger in and slightly turn. Then it would cause the dial to return to its starting position due to an internal recoil spring. I asked him what it was; he said it's called a telephone (sign phone). I said, what do we use it for? He said to call people. I recall, at that young age, asking who can we call, our relatives are all Deaf. He, looked at me, and said oh.... I'll ask at work how it works. He did, and later on I was taught by my oldest sister who is 11 years older than me to dial and talk to hearing people. I didn't know any hearing people other than other codas, who had deaf parents. But, I did know the neighbors. My father encouraged me to ask them for their number and I did, As time went on, I learned to call them but I really wanted to talk to my dad and my mom on the phone, but I couldn't. I learned if I was late, I had to call the neighbor and then she would write a message, cross the street, press the flashing doorbell and hope my dad would see it, to pass on a message from me. He, in turn, would write on a pad of paper, and my neighbor would run back and tell me what he wrote. This went on for about 20 years of my life. And I am not that old. You do not see although he paid for a phone for me to use, He Never once used it nor did my sister or brother. Only I, That little black gadget was mine because I could hear. Looking back, I recall my parents paying a lot of money for something they could never use. In 20 years, based on 25.00 a month, that's about \$ 6 thousand dollars. My parents made a modest income and this was a luxury item.

With estimates of 100,000 Deaf Canadians potentially using the telephone for their families. That comes out to over \$600 million dollars that they have spent on something they never could use so their kids could use the telephone.

Fast forward to 2011 and we have the Telus trials, a remarkable service which creates autonomy for all BC and Albertan citizens who have signed up to try out the new service. My family continues to call me and I can have meaningful communications with them from the convenience of my cell phone. First time in 48 years of my life, I can "talk "to them! At first it was quite foreign to me, but as the interpreter conveyed the emotions, feeling, intonation and the message, I embraced it. My family thought it was so cool being able to talk to me. At the time of the trials, one of my Deaf relatives became very ill very suddenly and I was able to speak to them on the spot through the VRS to determine how serious it was. Sure enough, they needed hospitalization and I reassured my aunt that I was on my way. I called my cousins who are all Deaf and notified them immediately that things were not turning out so well and that our aunt seemed to be in a great deal of pain. We rushed to the hospital and met one another to be with her. We had been there all night and the doctor suggested we go home and get a few hours of sleep and be back in the morning so they could determine what the cause of her severe pain was. We left and the following morning, I was called back to the hospital immediately. A diagnosis was determined and I needed to notify my family who was all deaf at the time, the urgency of meeting and discussing a plan. I hadn't realized by this time, I had been there all day with the doctors and my aunt trying to figure out what was wrong with her. I then had a moment where I was able to phone and call my cousins to provide them with updates. As I called the VRS voice line, I heard, "this line is no longer in service. It was disconnected. My heart sunk and I cried my eyes out... This freedom that was afforded to me and many codas across BC and Alberta was now gone. Memories of my childhood came racing back, how do I call the neighbor, what's their name, never mind what's their number, how do I get the message to my family while staying at the hospital with my aunt ?

Through a series of phone calls, my partner who wasn't home at the time, another neighbor, not home, then a friend not home, and finally a colleague who ran over and told my relatives in person that things had turned to the worse and they needed to be with me at the hospital. They arrived in time and the doctor's told us all of the grave news. On February 2, 2012, my aunt passed away. One moment! One moment where accessibility and transparency was gone.

It was like it was when I growing up as a child. How could this be? Everything that was accessible and equal could be taken away at a moment's notice.

Can you imagine this?

Since the ending of the VRS trials in British Columbia, my family and others have gone back to the traditional ways of asking someone to make a phone call.

They either ask their kids first as its convenient or other hearing family members to call for them. These includes calling the banks to activate their parent's credit cards as you

can only do this by voice and not by message relay service and answering the teachers phone calls to the parents. These are just a few examples.

**Social needs:**

For eighteen months, our community in British Columbia was able to experience independence, pride, and self awareness in placing calls through VRS. They could call their employer, doctor, air miles, bank, hospital, lawyer, their kid's teachers, family members, and virtually anybody that they wished to speak to in a natural way that made communicating in their natural language much easier in a seamless manner.

Now, without video relay services, our community cannot conduct themselves in the simplest tasks of daily life that are afforded to the majority of Canadians.

Technology and the training of sign language interpreters in Video relay services afforded us the ability to become equal.

It's been many generations where our community has had to be codependent on one another to create access. Misunderstanding, miscommunications' create undue hardship on us when we cannot understand written messages or text messages. A video relay service would provide us the clarity and allows us to truly understand one another linguistically, socially and culturally. It is necessary to further improve the accessibility of communications for our community.

Canada currently has video relay service centers across the country, with Canadian trained interpreters who were supported with thousands of volunteer hours by the Deaf and interpreting community for their training in sign language and interpretation as well as their practicum experiences yet we only serve American citizens.

We have a solution in place; we need Canadians to have access to the service. Telephone service providers need to modernize and provide funding for VRS.

It's time to move forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and say yes to the implementation of VRS services in Canada for Canadians. Upon voting yes, our next step is to develop a modernization plan.

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AVA now to speak in ENGLISH for the rest of the presentation.

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## **Modernization plan:**

As Commissioner Jean- Pierre Blais reiterated in his speech on June 17, 2013 in regard to modernization with the residents of Nunavut, We are on parallel, the Deaf community needs to have modernization as well when it comes to telecommunications.

Alexander Graham Bell was an eminent scientist, inventor, engineer and innovator who is credited with inventing the first practical telephone.

Bell's father, grandfather, and brother had all been associated with work on elocution and speech, and both his mother and wife were Deaf, profoundly influencing Bell's life's work in inventing the telephone.

While Bell is regarded highly for his invention of the telephone, he is not widely recognized in the Deaf community because he focused so much on speech and not the natural language of sign language which preserves identity for us in the Deaf community. It's ironic that in today's terms, Bell would be regarded as a coda, because his mother was Deaf. Yes, a person who was a coda invented the phone and yet, unfortunately, not accessible for the signing Deaf community.

We need to upgrade the following:

Enlist VRS for Canadian citizens

Include representatives from Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf Blind members of the community as well as Coda's, parents of Deaf children who use the service at its optimum as well as representatives from our national interpreting organization AVLIC, The Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada to ensure the health and safety standards of interpreters who provide VRS services in our community are being met. They all need to be partners at all levels of the process of initiating VRS services with Video Relay service providers.

Ensure interoperability

## **EQUAL Rights for Equal Canadian citizens**

The World Federation of the Deaf. <http://wfdeaf.org/human-rights/crpd> has The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). This is an international human rights instrument of the United Nations, which protects the rights and promotes equality of persons with disabilities. The CRPD also sets a framework for deaf people's rights filling an important gap in international human rights legislation. There are

several articles on their website that identify the international recognition of equal access to telecommunications.

a) Providing information intended for the general public to persons with disabilities in accessible formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of disabilities in a timely manner and without additional cost; For example, providing the cost of internet services equal to what a phone would cost when VRS services are implemented.

b) Accepting and facilitating the use of sign languages, Braille, augmentative and alternative communication, and all other accessible means, modes and formats of communication of their choice by persons with disabilities in official interactions;

c) Urging private entities that provide services to the general public, including through the Internet, to provide information and services in accessible and usable formats for persons with disabilities; For example, encouraging banks to allow activation of credit cards on line for people who are Deaf or unable to speak on a conventional telephone.

d) Encouraging the mass media, including providers of information through the Internet, to make their services accessible to persons with disabilities; For example, providing the live streaming of the CRTC proceedings this week in sign language so members of our communities can watch and follow the proceedings. Thank you.

Reasonable accommodation" means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms;

Article 2 "Discrimination on the basis of disability" means any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation;

I believe the provision of VRS services in Canada meets the above criteria for providing our community with the basic fundamental rights to expressions, as well as enhancing the quality of life for political, social, economic and cultural activities. We can connect with our family, friends, colleagues, and whoever we need to at a click of a moment. This has and will change our lives once reinstated in British Columbia as well as the rest of Canada. Canadians are entitled to a world-class communication system

encompasses this understanding of Video Relay Services. Since 2009, our community has been lobbying for services. We are the pulse of Deaf Canadians and VRS is the heart of our communication system. It changes lives. We have seen it.

The power is yours at this moment. Make this moment count. Vote yes to the feasibility of VRS services in Canada. As well vote yes to support a universal fund to pay for the implementation of VRS services in Canada.

Thank you for your time in listening to my presentation.

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