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Rebecca Hollingsworth
Senior Policy Advisor
Communications Policy; Building, Resources & Markets
Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment

Re: Proposed changes to NZSL Video Interpreting and Relay Services

Dear Ms. Hollingsworth,

To help you understand our responses to the proposed changes (below) and their potential impact on the deafblind community, I give you information about what deafblindness is.

The World Federation of Deafblind endorses for global use the following Nordic definition for deafblindness, as it appeared in *Deafblind International Review*, June 2016: A combined vision and hearing impairment of such severity that it is hard for the impaired senses to compensate for each other. Thus, deafblindness is a distinct disability.

The main implications are that to varying degrees, deafblindness limits activities and restricts full participation in society. It affects social life, communication, access to information, orientation, and the ability to move around freely and safely. To help compensate for the combined vision and hearing impairment, the tactile sense becomes especially important.

In offering you the following comments, we ask that any proposed changes towards digital text-based relay services also support access to vision enhancement and Braille display technology, in order to accommodate the needs of deafblind people.

Change 1: Get you to register as a user

Registering is not the beginning, as many deafblind people cannot register because they do not have access to financial resources to purchase computers, tablets, and/or smartphones to use this technology. Therefore, assistance like the proposed changes needs to be linked across all government ministries to fund mainstream technology that has inbuilt accessibility features so that deafblind have access to register for this service.

Change 2: Make the Video Interpreting Service more available

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals recognise that deafblind and Deaf are two of the three most marginalised groups within the pan-disability sector. So Deafblind Association NZ fully support this change.

Change 3: Move to digital text-based relay services

“Everyday devices” are often not available to deafblind because we are underrepresented in employment and training statistics, which draw resources for those devices (see response to proposed Change 1). Currently government funding is available only for JAWS and other text-to-speech programs, but is *not* available to buy the “everyday device” onto which to install such programs. Where appropriate, deafblind also need access to digital Braille display

because the tactile sense is critical in support of full accessibility to text. We want no one left behind. With these pre-conditions to inclusion, we fully support this change.

Change 4: Phase out CapTel equipment

We are in support of the change, with the proviso that “everyday devices” are fully funded for deafblind to facilitate this transition period.

Change 5: Stop using teletypewriter (TTY) equipment

We are in support of the change, with the proviso that “everyday devices” are fully funded for deafblind to facilitate the transition to the new digital relay services.

Change 6: Stop speech-to-speech services

With the predominance of speech-impairment among the deafblind sector, we fully support this change.

Deafblind Association NZ Charitable Trust thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. In particular we thank you for the extended timeframe afforded us to make this submission. We invite you to contact us at any time should you require any further information to make positive change for deafblind now or in the future.

Kind regards,

David Wilson, Chair
Deafblind Association NZ Charitable Trust