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Dear Rebecca

Submission on the

Proposed changes to NZSL Video Interpreting and Relay Services

from

Deaf Aotearoa

Following is Deaf Aotearoa's submission the proposed changes to NZSL Video Interpreting and Relay Services. Deaf Aotearoa are happy to elaborate and discuss any part of this submission, and please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely

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Deaf Aotearoa

Deaf Aotearoa is the Disabled Person's Organisation (DPO) representing the voice of Deaf people, and is also the national service provider for Deaf people. Deaf Aotearoa has 14 offices across New Zealand that provide services to Deaf people and their families. Services include the *First Signs* service supporting families of deaf children age 0 – 5 years, youth, employment, needs assessment, information services and sign language interpreting through its national interpreting service *iSign.* Deaf Aotearoa coordinates New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Week each May to celebrate our language and culture.

Deaf Aotearoa works closely with Deaf communities, government agencies and other organisations to increase awareness, promote NZSL and strengthen the rights of Deaf people. All Deaf Aotearoa profits go back to the Deaf community by way of sponsorship, donations and new or improved services.

Deaf Aotearoa is New Zealand's representative member to the World Federation of the Deaf which has 133 country members, representing approximately 70 million Deaf people worldwide.

Deaf Aotearoa's vision is *"Full access and participation for Deaf people in Aotearoa New Zealand"* and its *Strategic Direction 2015 – 2020* focus areas include *Deaf people are valued, Deaf communities grow, develop and thrive*, and *Deaf people are educated and informed*. Progressing these focus areas includes ensuring Deaf people access government, community, health and social services, and access information to make informed decisions and achieve their goals.

Comment on Proposed Changes

1. **Get you to register as a user**

   Some government services require registration and logins in order to access those services, such as MY MSD, IRD, etc. However, it is not usual for people to need to register to make phone calls. It is not clear whether registration is essential and is the only option to enable users to receiving incoming calls and receive notifications or to top up an account. For example, is an app another simpler way to achieve these same outcomes?

   The Police's emergency TXT 111 service requires all potential users to register. An analysis of the TXT 111 registration system could be helpful here. For example, how many people have registered, how many people have undated their registration details when their address or phone number changed, and an indication of any problems or barriers created when a user wants to use the TXT 111 service but they have not registered or their details are out of date?

   Care needs to be taken to ensure that any extra step required of Deaf service users, such as a registration process and requiring users to keep that updated and any login processes, do not create extra barriers or discourage use by Deaf users, many of whom may have low IT-literacy skills.

   Access to the phone should be on par with hearing people. It is easy for hearing people to pick up the phone and call any number, and to have any number call you. There is no registration, login or pre-planning required for hearing people to make and receive phone calls. Deaf people have a right to access the phone equally and should not have to take extra steps or jump through additional hoops to get the same access that hearing people get.

2. **Make the Video Interpreting Service more available**

   Deaf people have been calling for extensions to the Video Interpreting Service hours for several years. Extending the hours of this service will help increase Deaf people's participation in society.

   Making the VIS more available requires more than just increasing the hours of the service. It requires attention to the quality of the service, including the quality of the technological systems and hardware and the quality of the NZSL interpreting.

   Deaf Aotearoa is aware of times when the VIS has provided good access and times when it has caused disruptions and frustrations for the users, both Deaf and hearing.

The VIS uses the Skype platform which is not the best in terms of guaranteeing a smooth connection.

Hardware used by Deaf people varies greatly and we are aware of several attempts to use the VIS service where the Deaf user has had to hang up part way through due to the VIS interpreters not being able to hear people in the room, and the VIS advising they get a better computer with a better microphone in it, or purchase a separate microphone to plug into their computer. As a population group, Deaf people comprise a low socio-economic group, and can have less access to purchasing the best quality IT hardware.

The data amounts required to make VIS and other Relay Service calls needs to also consider that many Deaf people are unable to afford the high amounts of data required to be able to make VIS calls whenever they need and particularly when they are out and about and out of Wifi range. This barrier of data amounts and data costs needs to be addressed to help make the VIS more available to Deaf people.

The quality of the VIS interpreting services also impacts on increasing the availability and accessibility of the service. For example, we are aware of VIS interpreting services (provided out of Auckland) not being able to provide good access to a Wellington Deaf user in an important employment meeting due to the interpreters provided on that call not being of the appropriate skills level to match the situation, and not being familiar with the lingo of that employer and signs that are familiar to Wellington-based interpreters. Ongoing training of the VIS interpreters should include learning from a range of Deaf users from around the country.

3. **Move to digital text-based relay services**

Making calls to landlines and mobiles free of charge would help reduce the barriers and make access to the phone more equitable for Deaf people. Hearing people do not have to go through additional steps to make phone calls to mobile numbers, and requiring Deaf people to undertake extra steps to make calls to mobile numbers, as is currently the case, is discriminatory.

See comment above about the affordability of the necessary data amounts being a barrier to many Deaf people. This barrier needs to be addressed to ensure the VIS and Relay Services are fully accessible to Deaf people.

4. Phase out CapTel equipment

If the 'digital text based relay services' mentioned in the MBIE's discussion document ("*Change 3*", page 9) will provide the same or better service than the current CapTel equipment provides, then Deaf Aotearoa supports phasing out this specialist CapTel equipment and moving to using everyday devices.

It would be very important to communicate this change, for example how the new digital relay services work, to all user communities in ways that are most accessible for them. For the Deaf community, this means that information must be provided in NZSL. Further support to understand this change and to learn how to use the new service should also be provided.

5. Stop using Teletypewriter (TTY) equipment

Deaf Aotearoa supports this. We are not aware of any demand for TTY equipment in recent years.

6. Stop speech-to-speech services

Deaf Aotearoa represents Deaf New Zealanders and whilst many Deaf people have other disabilities we are not aware of Deaf people who use the TRS speech-to-speech service and so are unable to comment on this proposed change.