

# TEXAS COMMISSION ON JAIL STANDARDS

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## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MEMORANDUM

**TO:** All Sheriffs and Jail Administrators  
**FROM:** Brandon Wood, Executive Director  
**REGARDING:** Video Relay Service for Deaf Inmates  
**DATE:** November 26, 2018

From time to time, you may have an inmate that is either deaf or has a hearing disability. These inmates most likely use American Sign Language (ASL) as their primary means of communication. In order to accommodate these inmates, the Commission encourages jails to include a provision for Video Relay Service (VRS) in their inmate telephone services contracts or to otherwise give inmate's access to VRS. The service and the equipment are paid for by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). **There is no cost to the jails.**

According to FCC, VRS enables persons with hearing disabilities who use American Sign Language to communicate with voice telephone users through video equipment rather than through typed text. The inmate contacts a VRS operator by using a television, a computer with a video camera device and a broadband (high speed) Internet connection, or by using a VRS provider's internet site. They communicate with each other in sign language. Then the VRS operator places a phone call to the third party whom the inmate wishes to call. The VRS operator relays the conversation back and forth between the inmate using sign language and the third party using voice. Currently, around ten providers offer VRS. VRS is free to the caller. VRS providers are compensated for their costs from the Interstate TRS Fund, which the FCC oversees.

Many jails provide only TTYs for prisoners or arrestees who are deaf to access telephone services, which may not be effective. Therefore, other forms of telecommunications technologies such as videophones may be necessary. Public entities, including jails, must give primary consideration to the requests of the individual who is deaf or hard of hearing. Minimum Jail Standards do not require VRS, and it is not part of jail inspections. However, VRS is often viewed as a basic need, and jails should provide it whenever possible. For more information, visit:

<https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/video-relay-services>.

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"The Commission on Jail Standards welcomes all suggestions and will promptly respond to all complaints directed against the agency or any facilities under its purview."  
*To empower local government to provide safe, secure and suitable local jail facilities through proper rules and procedures while promoting innovative programs and ideas*