

June 15, 2015

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Ms. Dortch,

I wanted to share my experience with Telmate's single call program in February of 2015. I was charged an unreasonable amount that was also *more* than the price I was quoted on the phone prior to agreeing to pay for the call.

I feel that these single call programs have gotten insufficient attention in your docket. I have seen the Prison Policy Initiative's letter about single call programs¹ and the rare other mentions in your docket and want to supplement the record with my first-hand experience using Telmate's "QuickConnect" single call product.

In early February 2015, my girlfriend was arrested in Alabama for forgetting to pay a traffic ticket. Over the span of a few days, she called me seven times, so I have experienced the "single call" program many times.

My mobile phone rang, and I was able to talk to my panicking girlfriend for less than a minute before being interrupted by a Telmate message. I rushed to give my credit card information before I could hear how much the call would cost.

The second time my girlfriend called, I navigated through Telmate's lengthy phone tree to get more information about the call's cost before giving my credit card number. This took some digging. Eventually, I found the "charges related to this call" option, and I heard this message:

"Your account will be charged \$2.39 for the first minute plus zero cents per minute up to the max call time of 15 minutes. In addition to the quoted bill of the call, applicable taxes and fees will apply."²

My girlfriend called five more times that week. Days after the first call, I received a surprising credit card bill. **My bill showed that I was charged far more than Telmate's quoted amount of \$2.39. Telmate charged me almost 5 times as much, or \$11.33 per call.** A copy of the call dates and charges can be found at the end of this letter.

Besides the general ill of profiting off my friend's misfortune, I think Telmate is doing several specific things wrong here:

¹ Notably, the Prison Policy Initiative reported that Telmate wouldn't give them the total cost of a call before processing the charges. For a call from the Oregon State Penitentiary, they were quoted a cost of \$6.67, plus unspecified "credit card and handling charges." See the letter online at <http://apps.fcc.gov/ecfs/document/view?id=60001013052>.

² Transcribed from recording of the audio. Audio file available on request.

1. **Structuring the phone tree to hide information about call charges:** People who want information about how much they will be billed have to actively search for it.
2. **Charging more than the disclosed amount:** Now, to be sure, the difference between the disclosed charge and what I was actually charged could be the unspecified “applicable taxes and fees.” But not disclosing 79% of the cost of each call is misleading at best and fraud at worst.

I have filed complaints with the Better Business Bureau and the FTC. After hearing my story, the FTC agreed that Telmate’s single call program charge was deceptive, so I filed a chargeback request. But the FCC must take further action to prevent Telmate and similar companies from exploiting other people. These companies are earning unchecked and unfair profits by **forcing customers to choose between paying an unreasonable charge that they cannot afford** and helping a loved one in a difficult time of need.

The FCC should bring an end to these problems by banning single call programs. This will prevent other people from feeling the frustration and financial strain that I have experienced. The FCC should also require a change in Telmate’s phone tree message. Telmate’s practices are surely as profitable as they are unjust. Because these phone companies have no incentive to fix the problem, it is up to you to hold them accountable. Please do so.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robin Fussell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robin" being more prominent than the last name "Fussell".

Robin Fussell
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