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October 21, 2015

The Honorable Tom Wheeler, Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

RE: Comment for WC Docket 12-375

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

I appreciate the opportunity to submit comments to the Federal Communications Commission's Proposed Rulemaking (WC Docket No. 12-375) on Inmate Calling Services. I urge you to adopt the proposed comprehensive reform of intrastate, interstate, and international Inmate Calling Services to address the unreasonable costs of communication for inmates and their families. The proposed rule would establish caps on the cost of telephone calls made on an intrastate and international basis, adding to the current interstate authority. While I would prefer calls to cost even less, this is an important step forward.

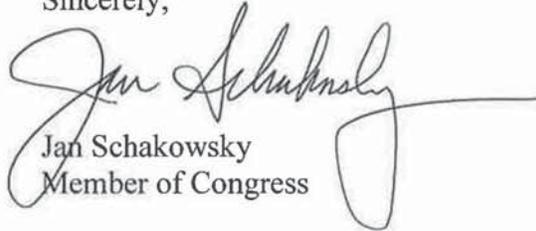
Lowering phone rates for inmates is not only a matter of fairness; it is a matter of public interest. Studies consistently find that incarcerated individuals who maintain close contact with family members while incarcerated have better post-release outcomes and lower recidivism rates. Given the evidence, it should be a priority to make communication with family available and affordable.

The high cost of prison phone calls is also a significant barrier and financial burden to families who want maintain contact with an incarcerated loved one. Research has shown the fees associated with staying in touch with a loved one are paid mostly by family members, with female family members bearing most of the cost. More than one in three (43%) families with an incarcerated family member went into debt to cover the cost of staying in contact with that family member. This is a particular burden for women who find themselves struggling to meet the needs of their families. In addition, the lack of contact with an incarcerated parent may have long-term impacts on children. More than 27 million children living in the United States have an incarcerated parent. For many of them, telephone calls may be the only way to maintain a relationship with a parent who is incarcerated many miles away.

Champaign County, Illinois operates a system that proves it is possible to provide inexpensive and efficient phone services to inmates. Not only has the County been able to maintain low phone service costs by eliminating commissions, it has been able to expand communications options by offering video visitations. This example proves there is no justification for the exorbitant cost of phone calls currently faced by inmates.

I urge you to adopt the Proposed Rulemaking on Inmate Calling Services and to improve outcomes for incarcerated individuals by lowering the prohibitive cost of Inmate Calling Services. Doing so would be in the best interests of inmates, their families and, by reducing recidivism rates and improving post-release outcomes, the community at large.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jan Schakowsky", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

November 24, 2015

The Honorable Jan Schakowsky
U.S. House of Representatives
2367 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Schakowsky:

Thank you for your letter urging the Commission to adopt comprehensive reform of intrastate, interstate, and international inmate calling services (ICS) to address the unreasonable costs of communication for inmates and their families. Your views are very important and will be included in the record of the proceeding.

Few issues the Commission acts upon have a more direct and meaningful impact on the lives of millions of American than ICS reform. As you note, contact between inmates and their loved ones has been shown to reduce the rate of recidivism, but high inmate calling rates have made that contact unaffordable for many families, who often live in poverty. Therefore, inmate calling reform is not only the right thing to do, it is also good policy.

Our reform efforts have been spearheaded by Commissioner Mignon Clyburn, who began championing this issue when she arrived at the Commission in 2009. Under her stewardship as acting Chairwoman in 2013, the FCC adopted interim caps on excessive rates for ICS calls across state lines, and she continues to demonstrate her valiant leadership on this critically important issue, particularly for the 2.7 million children for whom at least one parent is incarcerated.

On October 22, 2015, the Commission adopted the *Second Inmate Calling Services Report and Order* (Order) and *Third Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking* (FNPRM). In this Order, the Commission adopted additional ICS reforms to ensure a reasonable rate structure for phone calls from inmates at correctional facilities, including tiered rate caps that apply to all interstate and intrastate inmate calling. Pursuant to Sections 201 and 276 of the Communications Act, the tiered rate caps are sufficient to allow providers to continue to receive fair compensation and a reasonable return on investment and, at the same time, fully cover the enhanced security requirements of inmate calling. The tiered rate caps are based on facility size and type and grounded in the data received in response to the Commission's 2014 Mandatory Data Collection, which demonstrated a difference in costs to serve facilities of different types and sizes.

The new rules also close loopholes by barring most add-on fees imposed by ICS providers and set strict limits on the few fees that remain. This includes prohibiting mandatory minimum payments and placing a floor on mandatory maximum account deposits. Furthermore, the rules prohibit providers from imposing so-called "flat-rate calling," which is a flat rate for a

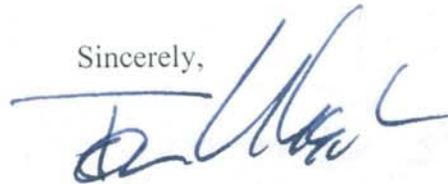
call up to 15 minutes regardless of actual call duration. Extra fees and charges can increase by as much as 40 percent the cost of families staying in touch by phone with loved ones who are incarcerated. In addition, the Order mandates discounted rates for disability-access calls, requires annual reporting and certification by inmate calling providers, and establishes periodic reviews of these reforms.

Although the Commission did not prohibit providers from paying site commissions, the Order excluded site commission payments from the cost data the Commission used in setting the rate caps. It also made clear that providers may not exceed the rate caps or ancillary service charge caps, even if they have agreed to pay site commissions. Furthermore, the associated FNPRM seeks comment on how to encourage parties to move away from site commissions and urges states to take action on this issue. Additionally, the Commission committed to monitor site commission payments and stated that it will not hesitate to re-evaluate the Commission's findings and take further action if necessary.

The FNPRM also seeks additional comment on rates for international calls, promoting competition in the ICS industry, the benefits of a recurring Mandatory Data Collection, requiring ICS providers to file their ICS contracts with the Commission, and video visitation and other newer technologies to increase ICS options

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tom Wheeler", with a horizontal line drawn above the first few letters.

Tom Wheeler