

February 12, 2013

WC Docket No. 12-375 – Prison Telephone Rates to Support Access to Videophones, Captioned Telephones and Reasonable Rates for Deaf & Signing Prisoners and their Families

To Whom It May Concern,

I am submitting my comment supporting the stance on lowering the cost of phone calls from prison. It is my hope that by sharing my personal experience considerations regarding to the challenges of telephone access and rates for prisoners with disabilities would be made; thus providing Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing and Deaf-Blind inmates telecommunication accessibility that has been lacking.

My father has been in a federal camp at Pennsylvania for a year now. He has been sentenced to 9 years. He is Deaf, and so are my mother, brother and myself. My sister is hearing, but has Down Syndrome and communicates mainly through American Sign Language (ASL). In short, we ALL communicate through ASL, a language of its own unique syntax and grammar. My family lives at Maryland, but I live at Texas, which limits me the opportunity to visit my father as often as I would have liked to. My father has not seen or spoken with my children in a year now.

My father, as the only Deaf person at the camp, does not have access to basic communication on daily basis. The camp took the initiative to set up a TTY for my father at one of the counselors' office. Unfortunately, TTY is obsolete. No one in my family has a TTY! No one in my family has a telephone line! We rely on Internet for text and video communication. We use videophone, which allows us to communicate in sign language in real-time, to make phone calls. If my father had access to videophone, without worrying about the cost, he would be able to communicate with my family and myself more often.

I worry, though, that even if the camp attains a videophone; it would still be inaccessible due to where the equipment is located and the cost of making calls. Currently the TTY, though ineffective, is located in the counselor's office, which limits its access. If that were the case with the videophone, it would defeat its purpose of making telecommunication accessible and easily attainable.

Being the only Deaf inmate, my father is very isolated. In his own words, "prison camp for a deaf inmate is more hardship than hearing inmates. I am extremely lonely. Yes, the people here are nice...the truth is I have no social life, very limited human interaction. I wish I could participate in their excitement or follow their

discussion, but I can't. All the reasons/facts are under the handling of the lack of communication accommodations." Having a videophone available and accessible would grant him the ability to communicate with family and friends. It may help alleviate some of his loneliness.

Thank you for your consideration in making it so that the Deaf and signing prisoners does not pay the same rates to use telephones, have access to relay numbers, as well as equitable telecommunication equipment so that they can communicate freely with family members and friends, just as other inmates.

Thank you,

Mei Kennedy