

August 1, 2013

Dear Chairwoman Clyburn:

We, representing many diverse faith traditions, write to urge you to take action to bring down the telephone rates paid by families and clergy who place telephone calls to prisons.

As you know, currently families of prisoners must pay up to one dollar per minute for a long-distance call to a prison, in addition to call set-up fees and other charges. Since most prisoners are incarcerated far away from their homes, telephone calls are often the only link between someone behind bars and a supportive network in their own community. Without ties to their families and community networks, inmates are at a much greater risk of returning to prison after their release.

The cause of these exorbitant rates is disturbing. Routinely in this country, prisons and jails charge very high commissions to the companies that offer secure telephone service for prisoners. These rates are then passed on to the families and loved one who pay for the calls. Prisoners don't have choice, they are permitted to use only the telephone company selected by the prison. Families bear the financial burden.

Our diverse faith traditions all emphasize the importance of treating everyone in society as a human being worthy of grace and respect. Maintaining ties with people in prison is, for us, a moral issue. Individuals fulfilling this moral obligation, and family members desperate to speak with a father, a grandmother or a child, should not be burdened with a financial penalty that can reach hundreds of dollars per month.

The time for waiting is over. We strongly urge the Federal Communications Commission to adopt final rules capping interstate telephone rates as requested by the Wright petition before it sees its ten-year anniversary in November 2013.

Sincerely,

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Pastor Joseph Amico, First Congregational Church of West Brattleboro, VT, United Church of Christ, Fitzwilliam, NH

Iris Anderson, Unitarian Universalist, Laguna Niguel, CA

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