



Department of Communications

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December 23, 2013

Chairman Thomas Wheeler
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Rates for Inmate Calling Services, WC Docket No. 12-375

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

Serving the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, which represents millions of Americans, I write today to support equitable and fair charges for phone calls to and from prisons, jails, and immigration detention centers. On behalf of the bishops, I thank the Commission for its decision to address, at long last, the outrageous charges paid by families, friends, and community leaders who place long distance telephone calls to incarcerated or detained people. After ten years of bearing this extreme financial burden, these community members will finally receive long-overdue relief. Moreover, the Commission's recent decision to implement this decision in a timely manner is to be lauded. Finally, I offer support for the Commission's proposals to take further action to address the high costs associated with local telephone calls to inmates and detainees and the unacceptable circumstances facing inmates with disabilities.

The Commission should address local telephone rates. In our experience, the cost of local telephone calls to jails, prisons, and immigration detention centers are just as problematic as long-distance rates. While some states have commendably taken action to address these rates, and a few have begun proceedings to review them, unfortunately many more states have yet to act. Although in some instances the Commission does not have authority over intrastate telephone service, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 granted broad authority to regulate intrastate payphone rates, which includes rates charged inmates and their loved ones. Much of the record which supported lowered rates for long-distance calls also support lower local rates: the unjustness of the extreme financial burden on friends and family members who have transgressed no laws, the flaws in the market system which do not permit competition to bring down prices, and negative impact on recidivism and reentry when inmates are deprived of the relationships they require to thrive once they are released into society.

In particular, the deaf and hard of hearing community face unique challenges. People with hearing and other disabilities have the same rights to communicate as hearing people. For an inmate that faces particular health-related challenges, communication with the outside world can be even more critical. In the present day and age, when technology is often used to make communications simpler and more seamless for people with disabilities, the needs of inmates

cannot go unaddressed. Please heed the advice offered by the disabilities communities themselves. These stakeholders should be directly involved in any decisions the Commission makes with regard to their needs. This action would be a commendable step to implement your strong commitment to find mechanisms for the Commission to assist people with disabilities.

For all the above reasons, I encourage you to address unreasonable local phone rates to prisons, jails and detention centers and take up the task of addressing the needs of incarcerated people with disabilities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Helen Osman".

Helen Osman
Secretary of Communications