

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER MIGNON L. CLYBURN**

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

Today, we officially answer the call from tens of thousands of consumers who have written, emailed, and yes, phoned the Commission, pleading for relief on interstate long distance rates from correctional facilities. As discussed in the Notice, the nearly ten year old "Wright Petition," was filed on behalf of friends and family of the incarcerated, who generally pay significantly higher toll rates than those offered for the typical interstate, long distance call. This NPRM requests information from providers of inmate calling services in order for the Commission to determine whether those rates are just and reasonable. It also seeks comment on various options submitted in the record, to limit those rates. I encourage providers to file detailed cost information and to work with the Commission, as well as the interested consumer and public interest groups, to find workable solutions to this important issue.

The telephone is a crucial instrument for the incarcerated, and those who care about them, because voice calling is often the only communications option available. Most inmates along with their families and friends are low-income, so in-person visits due to distance and expense are infrequent. It is not uncommon for state prisons to be located hundreds of miles away from urban centers, but even in places where the facility is nearby, the engagement often requires a significant amount of time to clear security. And because many of these complexes are frequently overcrowded and ill-equipped to handle the volume of visitors, the wait (not even to mention the economic burden of missing work, etc.) is quite severe.

So why should the rest of us care? Maintaining contact with family and friends during incarceration not only helps the inmate, but it is beneficial to our society as a whole. There are well over two million children with at least one parent behind bars and regardless of their circumstances, both children and parents gain from regular contact with one another. Studies also show that those released are less likely to reoffend if they are able to maintain relationships with their loved ones while they are in prison. With seven hundred thousand individuals released every year from these institutions, it is crucial that we do whatever we can to strengthen family ties before these individuals return home. One sure way to realize this is through the provisioning of affordable phone service. The overall costs of not doing so are too great, for those who re-offend place a substantially higher economic burden on taxpayers than any lost proceeds that would result from lower prison phone rates.

It is important, however, that any steps taken do not jeopardize quality phone service to and from correctional facilities, and that the security features needed by law enforcement remain intact. But the time is now for us to have an honest discussion about the use of site commissions and their impact on low-income families. We are seeking that information in this Notice.

I want to thank the Chairman and my colleagues for their work on and their support for this Notice, as well as our staff who spent many hours sifting through the thousands of pages of this decade old proceeding. It also is important to recognize the hard work of the community-based social, media justice, religious, legal and immigration organizations, the FCC's own Consumer Advisory Committee and the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners. All have been bringing significant attention to this issue and have urged this Commission and our state counterparts to review these rates and act, where necessary, to protect consumers. As a result, we have seen several states take action to lower their rates and today, I am pleased that this Commission is gathering the information it needs to ensure that all consumers have access to just and reasonable interstate rates.