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For Immediate Release

FCC TAKES NEXT BIG STEPS IN REDUCING INMATE CALLING RATES

Also Seeks Comment on Reforms for Video Visitation and additional reforms for international rates and ancillary charges

Washington, D.C. (October 22, 2015) – Acting on its mandate to ensure that rates for phone calls are just, reasonable and fair for all Americans, the Federal Communications Commission today took further steps to rein in the excessive rates and egregious fees on phone calls paid by some of society's most vulnerable: people trying to stay in touch with loved ones serving time in jail or prison.

With the cost of a call sometimes ballooning to $14 per minute once inside prison walls, the FCC for the first time capped rates for local and in-state long-distance inmate calling, and cut its existing cap on interstate long-distance calls by up to 50 percent.

At the same time, the FCC closed loopholes by barring most add-on fees imposed by inmate calling service (ICS) providers, and set strict limits on the few fees that remain. Extra fees and charges can increase the cost of families staying in touch by phone with loved ones who are incarcerated by as much as 40%.

While contact between inmates and their loved ones has been shown to reduce the rate of recidivism, high inmate calling rates have made that contact unaffordable for many families, who often live in poverty. Reducing the cost of these calls measurably increases the amount of contact between inmates and their loved ones, making an important contribution to the criminal justice reforms sweeping the nation.

Today's action builds on reforms begun by the FCC in 2013, when it acted on a petition by Martha Wright, a grandmother from Washington, D.C., for relief from the exorbitant rates she was paying to call her grandson in prison. These reforms set an interim cap of 21 cents per minute on interstate debit and prepaid calls, required ICS providers to file cost data. In October 2014, the FCC sought comment on the data and proposed to reform all inmate calling rates and fees.

The Order adopted by the Commission today acts on that data by lowering the cap to 11 cents per minute for all local and long distance calls from state and federal prisons, while providing tiered rates for jails to account for the higher costs of serving jails and smaller institutions.

The new caps fully cover the enhanced security requirements of inmate calling, while allowing providers a reasonable return. Following are key provisions of the Order:

- Requires providers to offer free access to telephone relay service (TRS) calls for inmates with communications disabilities and applies a steeply discounted rate for TTY-to-TTY calls.
- Reminds correctional institutions of their obligation to make TRS available to people with communications disabilities.
- Encourages jails and prisons to allow commonly used forms of TRS and requires them to report service quality issues.

- Oversight and monitoring
  - To monitor compliance, ICS providers are required to file data annually with information on rates, fees, site commission payments, the number of TRS-related calls and complaints, and video visitation rates and fees.
  - To ensure transparency for consumers, ICS providers must to disclose rates and fees

The new rates take effect 90 days after publication in the Federal Register in prisons, and 6 months after publication in the Federal Register in jails. The FCC is committed to closely monitoring the implementation of reforms, including a review in two years to determine if additional adjustments are required.

Finally, a **Third Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking** seeks comment on several issues, including:

- Rate caps for international ICS.
- How to promote competition in inmate calling services to reduce the need for regulation.
- The use, costs and rates of video visitation and other advanced inmate communications, services, and whether these services could be used to circumvent traditional ICS rates.
- The use of revenue-sharing agreements and whether additional reforms are necessary
- Whether the FCC should adopt a recurring mandatory data collection and submission of contracts

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