

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 15, 2015

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

Dear Chairman Wheeler,

We commend you on the recently proposed Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rule to cap intrastate prison phone calling charges and urge the passage of this proposal. We appreciate your work on this issue and the leadership of Commissioner Mignon Clyburn, who successfully took measures to cap interstate calling rates in 2013. The current proposal is a critical step forward in ensuring fair and just calling rates for incarcerated individuals.

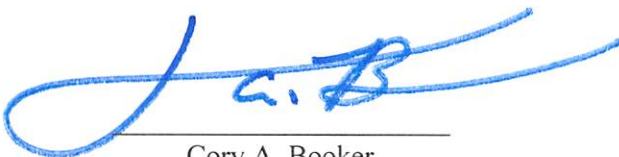
Keeping incarcerated people connected with their family support systems reduces recidivism and prison violence. Currently, 2.2 million Americans are incarcerated and more than 2.7 million children in the United States have an incarcerated parent. These children are often only able to connect with their parents by phone, as prisons and jails are often far away from where family members live. Despite falling telecommunications costs, phone calls between inmates and their families remain unreasonably high. In many states, a 15 minute call has an average cost of more than five dollars. In extreme cases, when all associated fees are incorporated in the aggregate cost, a phone call can cost as much as fourteen or fifteen dollars for a single minute.

Unfortunately, in many cases state prisons can receive a commission or “kick-back” from contracts with phone service providers, thus incentivizing a regime in which prisons profit from charging inmates higher rates. What may come as a financial benefit to institutions comes at a serious social cost, since many incarcerated people find the high costs of calling home prohibitive, and the high rates can prevent them from keeping in touch with loved ones.

For these reasons, it is of utmost importance that the FCC move forward with its proposal to curb intrastate calling rates for inmates. We applaud the FCC’s discouragement of commissions paid by phone providers to institutions and continued oversight of this matter. We also are encouraged by the Commission’s decision to review the market again in a few years, including a review of potential abuses in the video visitation telecommunication services market. These changes will enable families to stay connected and allow inmates to be better prepared to reenter society once their time has been served.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

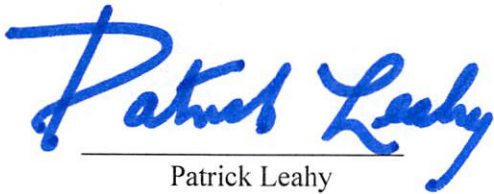
Sincerely,



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



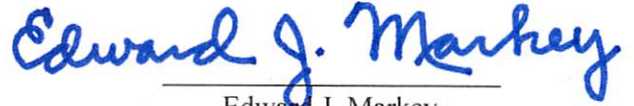
Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



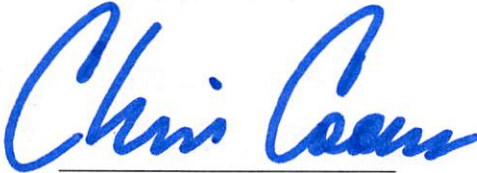
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Al Franken
United States Senator



Chris Coons
United States Senator



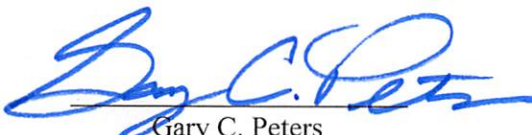
Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

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