

**Government
Executive**

Finally, Prisoners and Their Families Won't Have to Pay Crazy Phone Rates

By Rebecca J. Rosen

10:55 AM ET

Every year, 700,000 people walk through the doors of a correctional facility, back into a society that they left months or years ago. Who is waiting for them on the other side? When was the last time they spoke?

Fans of the Netflix series *Orange Is the New Black* know how important the prison's bank of phones is to the inmates. But what the show doesn't capture are the exorbitant costs that prisoners and their families must bear to maintain their connections -- much, much greater than what an average phone call costs. New rules approved by the FCC on Friday aim to bring down those rates.

The decision marks the end of a decade-long effort to get the FCC to regulate such calls, the costs of which are many times what an average citizen pays, though they vary greatly by state. In extreme cases, the FCC says, families and lawyers have paid more than \$17 for a 15-minute phone call. There is no market in which competition could draw down rates -- prisoners are literally a captive market, with no choice but to use the phones the prison provides. Many states collect a commission on the calls, effectively adding a tax to the inmates' calls through which the inmates pay for the costs of their own incarceration.

[Click here to read the full story at *The Atlantic*.](#)

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<http://www.govexec.com/oversight/2013/08/finally-prisoners-and-their-families-wont-have-pay-crazy-phone-rates/68612/>



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FCC Reduces High Long-Distance Calling Rates Paid by Inmates

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Released: August 9, 2013

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See *MCI v. FCC*, 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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FCC BARS HIGH RATES FOR LONG DISTANCE PHONE CALLS IN JAILS AND PRISONS NATIONWIDE

Reforms Bring Relief to Millions of Families By Reducing the Cost of Interstate Long-Distance Calls

Washington, D.C

The Federal Communications Commission today took long-overdue steps to ensure that the rates for interstate long-distance calls made by prison inmates are just, reasonable and fair.

Studies make clear that inmates who maintain contact with family and community while in prison have

reduced rate of recidivism and are more likely to become productive citizens upon their release. Lower

rates of recidivism also benefit society by reducing crime, the need for additional prisons, and other costs.

In addition, an estimated 2.7 million children would benefit from increased communication with an

incarcerated parent. Many of these children face challenges that are manifested in higher rates of truancy,

homelessness, depression and other ills

But the exorbitant price of interstate long-distance calls from correctional facilities today actually

discourages such communication because it is too expensive (over \$17 for one 15-minute call),

particularly for families facing economic hardship. The Order takes immediate action to change this and

provide an affordable means to *encourage* such communication.

The Commission's reforms adopt a simple and balanced approach that protects security and public safety

needs, ensures providers receive fair compensation while providing reasonable rates to consumers as

follows:

Requires that all interstate inmate calling rates, including ancillary charges, be based on the cost

of providing the inmate calling service

Provides immediate relief to exorbitant rates:

- o Adopts an interim rate cap of \$0.21 per minute for debit and pre-paid calls and \$0.25 per minute for collect calls, dramatically decreasing rates of over \$17 for a 15-minute call to no more than \$3.75 or \$3.15 a call
- o Presumes that rates of \$0.12 per minute for debit and prepaid calls (\$1.80 for a 15-minute call) and \$0.14 cents per minute for collect calls (\$2.10 for a 15-minute call) are just, reasonable and cost-based (safe-harbor rates)
- o These rates include the costs of modern security features such as advanced mechanisms that block calls to victims, witnesses, prosecutors and other prohibited parties; biometric

caller verification; real-time recording systems; and monitoring to prevent evasion of restrictions on call-forwarding or three-way calling

Concludes that "site commissions" payments from providers to correctional facilities may not be

included in any interstate rate or charge

Clarifies that inmates or their loved ones who use Telecommunications Relay Services because of

hearing and speech disabilities may not be charged higher rates

Requires a mandatory data collection, annual certification requirement, and enforcement provisions to ensure compliance with this Order

Seeks comment on reforming rates and practices affecting calls within a state

Seeks comment on fostering competition to reduce rates

Building on state reforms, the Commission's action addresses a petition filed nearly a decade ago by

Martha Wright, a Washington, D.C. grandmother who sought relief from exorbitant inmate calling rates.

Since then, tens of thousands have urged the FCC to make it possible for them to stay in touch with loved

ones in jail.

Action by the Commission August 9, 2013, by Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed

Rulemaking (FCC 13-113). Acting Chairwoman Clyburn and Commissioner Rosenworcel with

Commissioner Pai dissenting. Acting Chairwoman Clyburn, Commissioners Rosenworcel and Pai

issuing statements.

-FCC-

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