

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 12, 2025

The Honorable Brendan Carr
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street NE
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket Nos. 23-62 and 12-375

Chairman Carr:

We write to express our concern over your recent decision to halt implementation of the *Martha Wright-Reed Justice and Reasonable Communications Act* (“Martha Wright-Reed Act”), which requires the Federal Communications Commission to cap the soaring costs of phone and video calls for incarcerated people. Passed by Congress with bipartisan support, the Martha Wright-Reed Act granted the FCC clear authority to stop this kind of profiteering and mandated that the Commission promulgate rules no later than 24 months after enactment of the law. Stopping implementation of the FCC’s 2024 rate caps until 2027 appears to violate this statutory requirement and represents a deeply troubling reversal that will prolong the exploitation of incarcerated individuals and the families who struggle to stay connected with them.

Complying with the January 5, 2025, deadline written into the law, the Commission voted in July 2024 to approve new rules that capped significantly lowered per-minute rate caps for incarcerated people’s communications services. The 2024 order— approved unanimously by all five Commissioners, including yourself—capped call rates at \$0.06 per minute for prisons and large jails, \$0.07 for medium jails, \$0.09 for small jails, and \$0.12 for very small jails, and as low as \$0.11/minute for video calls.¹ Much of the Commission’s order went into effect in November 2024 and most service providers should have been in compliance by April 1, 2025. The Commission’s action was a long-overdue response to the rampant price gouging by prison telecommunications providers, which have forced families to pay as much as \$11.35 for a single 15-minute phone call.² Under the new rules, that same call would cost just \$0.90.³

¹ Federal Communications Commission, *Press Release: FCC Caps Exorbitant Phone & Video Call Rates for Incarcerated Persons & Their Families* (Washington, DC: Federal Communications Commission, July 18, 2024), <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-404087A1.pdf>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

The Wireline Competition Bureau's justification for halting implementation of the 2024 rules, which cites financial challenges for prison operators, is particularly concerning.⁴ The current system allows prison telecommunications providers to offer lucrative "commissions," or kickbacks to correctional facilities to secure exclusive contracts. These commissions can siphon off up to 50 percent of the money families spend on calls, turning basic communication into a revenue stream for prison operators.⁵ This model drives up prices and places institutional profit ahead of the human need for connection and rehabilitation.

This policy reversal will have immediate and devastating consequences for our constituents. For incarcerated individuals and their loved ones, phone and video calls are not luxuries—they are essential lifelines that maintain family bonds and support mental health. Families across the country have shared heartbreaking stories: a mother in Connecticut who spent hundreds of dollars a month to call her son, sometimes sacrificing meals and other necessities; and a California college student who met her incarcerated father for the first time while he was incarcerated but could only afford to speak to him twice afterward.⁶ In fact, one in three families with an incarcerated family member report going into debt to stay connected.⁷

These personal sacrifices are not without consequence. Research shows that maintaining family connections while incarcerated leads to better reentry outcomes and reduces recidivism.⁸ When we make it harder for people behind bars to communicate with their families, we aren't just punishing them, we're undermining public safety and community stability.

This is precisely why Congress passed the Martha Wright-Reed Act in the first place. Named after Martha Wright-Reed, a grandmother who spent 20 years fighting predatory telecom practices while spending hundreds of dollars per month to stay in touch with her incarcerated grandson, the law was meant to correct decades of injustice.⁹ You voted to implement this law.

⁴ Federal Communications Commission. 2025. "Incarcerated People's Communications Services Order—DA 25-565." Washington, DC: FCC, July 2025. <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-25-565A1.pdf>.

⁵ Masnick, Mike. 2024. "FCC Blocks Ban on Prison-Phone Price Caps." *Popular Information*, May 2024. <https://popular.info/p/fcc-blocks-ban-on-prison-phone-price>.

⁶ Kneebone, Elizabeth. 2024. "Connecticut Offers Free Prison Phone Calls, but Work Is Just Beginning." *CT Public*, May 31, 2024. <https://www.ctpublic.org/news/investigative/2024-05-31/connecticut-free-prison-phone-calls-but-work-is-just-beginning>; Smith, John. 2015. "Steep Costs of Inmate Phone Calls Are Under Scrutiny." *The New York Times*, March 31, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/31/us/steep-costs-of-inmate-phone-calls-are-under-scrutiny.html>.

⁷ Vera Institute. 2024. "The FCC Is Capping Outrageous Prison-Phone Rates — But Companies Are Still Price Gouging." *Vera Institute of Justice*, April 2024. <https://www.vera.org/news/the-fcc-is-capping-outrageous-prison-phone-rates-but-companies-are-still-price-gouging>.

⁸ U.S. Department of Justice. n.d. "Prison Reform." *Justice.gov*. Accessed July 8, 2025. <https://www.justice.gov/archives/prison-reform>; Wagner, Peter. 2021. "Family Contact." *Prison Policy Initiative*, December 21, 2021. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/12/21/family_contact/#:~:text=Consistent%20phone%20calls%20to%20family...


⁹ Doe, Jane. 2024. "FCC Cuts Call Rates in Prison." *The Washington Post*, July 20, 2024. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2024/07/20/fcc-cut-call-rates-prison/>.

Reversing course now is not only a disservice to the Commission's mission, but a betrayal of public trust.

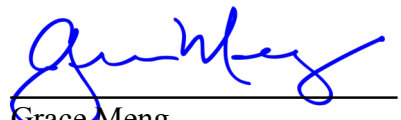
For these reasons, we urge you to immediately and fully enforce the 2024 rules. Families have waited long enough. Every additional year of delay prolongs the suffering of millions of Americans and perpetuates a system that profits off incarceration.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress



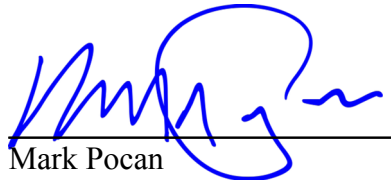
Jasmine Crockett
Member of Congress



Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



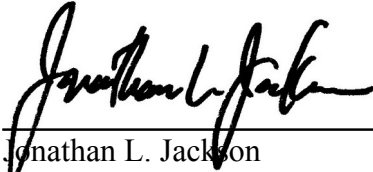
Eleanor Holmes Norton
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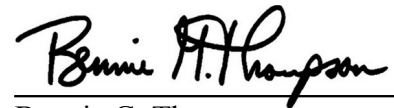
Jonathan L. Jackson
Member of Congress



Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



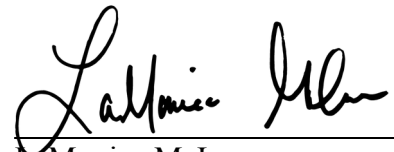
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



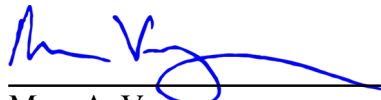
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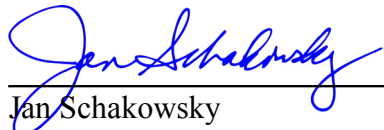
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