



July 17, 2024

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 23-62
***Ex Parte* Letter**

Dear Ms. Dortch:

On behalf of the Major County Sheriffs of America (MCSA), representing elected Sheriffs from the nation's largest counties, I am writing to express our concerns regarding the *Report and Order* to implement the *Martha Wright-Reed Act*.

MCSA recognizes the importance of maintaining familial and community connections for incarcerated individuals, as well as ensuring access to robust programming during incarceration. While we appreciate the Commission's efforts to make telephone calls for incarcerated individuals more affordable, we urge a pause to consider unintended likely consequences and consider adjusting implementation timelines to enable agencies whose inmate programming will be severely impacted to mitigate those consequences.

In a recent survey of our membership group, MCSA found significant concerns about the impact of proposed rate changes on correctional agencies and the incarcerated population. Revenue generated from calling fees and commissions currently supports a wide array of essential inmate programs, including health services, reentry planning, religious services, and substance use disorder treatment. These programs are crucial for reducing recidivism and improving quality of life within correctional facilities.

Specifically, 80% of our surveyed agencies currently use proceeds from inmate audio/video calls to fund a variety of important programming such as:

- Healthcare and Wellness: Substance use disorder treatment, mental health counseling.
- Family Programming: Free calls for immediate family, transportation for in-person visits, reunification services, parenting classes.
- Education Programming: GED classes, college courses, law library services, literacy/ESL classes.
- Reentry Programming: Vocational training, employment services, housing assistance, pre-release preparation.
- Recreational Programming: Exercise equipment, books, entertainment, TVs, food.
- Victim Services Programming: Counseling, notification services.

Reducing revenue from inmate calling services will jeopardize these critical programs. Many States and local agencies will struggle to secure alternative funding sources, placing essential programming at risk of reduction or elimination. Nearly half of the agencies surveyed (47.5%) indicated they would have no ability to pay for these services through other means if the proposed reforms are implemented.

The new caps on inmate calling rates will significantly impact many of our members, limiting the programming available to inmates and potentially resulting in staff reductions and fewer opportunities for incarcerated individuals.

Before proceeding with a vote on this matter, we urge the Commission to conduct a comprehensive study in collaboration with the Department of Justice and state and local agencies on the potential impact of these proposed reforms on programming for incarcerated individuals. This step is crucial to ensure that any reforms to inmate calling services are implemented with full consideration of their broader impacts on incarcerated individuals, correctional staff, and public safety and with enough time to mitigate negative consequences for inmate programming.

Thank you for considering our concerns on this issue.

Sincerely,



Megan E. Noland
Executive Director
Major County Sheriffs of America