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FCC Mail Room

The Honorable Penny Pritzker
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

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Tom Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Secretary Pritzker and Chairman Wheeler:

I write today regarding a serious problem that continues to face our nation's prisons: the persistent use of cell phones smuggled inside prison walls. Illegal cell phones allow criminals across the country to continue breaking the law and commit crimes from the inside. We must put a stop to this activity.

Fortunately, we have the technology at our fingertips to prevent this type of crime. Cell phone jamming is a technology that has evolved greatly over recent years. It is now so refined that certain rooms in buildings can be targeted. Jamming was relied on heavily as a tool to protect our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. If cell phone jamming can keep our troops safe abroad, then it can and should be used to keep our communities safe here at home.

In 2009, I asked the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to conduct a cell phone jamming demonstration to test for effectiveness and any potential unintended results. That study, conducted at the Bureau of Prisons facility in Cumberland, Maryland, showed no interference of the jamming technology with federal operations of the prison within the testing area – proof positive that we can jam criminals and protect communities.

I am requesting that NTIA and FCC work together with the state of Maryland to conduct another demonstration. The 2009 test made clear that it was possible this jamming technology could work. Because the technology has progressed tremendously in the years since the last test, I request that this new demonstration test the technology at a more in-depth level so that we can more thoroughly understand to what extent, if any, cell phone jamming interferes with other operations. I believe careful implementation of this technology would give our prisons a limited yet highly effective tool to combat crime and help keep prisoners on the inside from contributing to crime on the outside. I ask you to consider this request without delay so that our prisons can immediately begin protecting our communities by implementing this technology.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senator

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