

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-3012**

January 13, 2015

15-48

The Honorable Tom Wheeler  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

I write to express my enthusiastic support for the Federal Communication Commission's efforts to regulate private companies that provide interstate telephone service for prison and jail inmates. As a result of these efforts, families will hopefully no longer have to choose between paying for essential household needs and maintaining contact with an incarcerated loved one.

Research suggests that inmates who maintain a relationship with their families while incarcerated are less likely to return to prison after their release. Yet, the exorbitant and unreasonable cost of making a phone call remains an impediment to maintaining that relationship, placing an unfair tax, not on the offender, but the family attempting to support the offender's rehabilitation.

Equally reprehensible is the fact that some states have added to this practice of legalized price gouging by willingly accepting a commission from the private companies that provide prison phone service. This seemingly "free money" in state budgets adds to the costs for families while simultaneously serving as a disincentive to stop the price gouging by these companies. The New Jersey Institute for Social Justice suggests that a 15 minute in state call from a county jail in New Jersey costs \$8.50 while a similar call in New York where commissions have been eliminated, costs just 72 cents.

While serving as the Majority Leader in the New Jersey General Assembly in 2008, I sponsored a series of hearings aimed at improving "re-entry" for the formerly incarcerated and finding meaningful solutions to cut state spending related to incarceration. These hearings produced countless hours of testimony related to the burden created by the high costs of making a call from prison.

I applaud the Federal Communications Commission's efforts to cap interstate calls and require companies to base charges on the actual costs of providing service. The Commission's work in this area

will go a long way in moving our nation's prison system closer to a system of rehabilitation where family contact and parental interaction is valued.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bonnie Watson Coleman". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Bonnie Watson Coleman  
Member of Congress