

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Rates for Interstate Inmate Calling Services*, WC Docket No. 12-375.

The United States is home to the largest incarcerated population in the world. While we have less than five percent of the people on the planet, we are responsible for a quarter of its prisoners. We currently have 2.2 million people housed in our prisons and jails. There is no other country that comes close.

These staggering statistics are not the result of our nation being inherently more criminal. They are the byproduct of a series of intentional policy choices that have increased the population of our prisons and jails nearly eight-fold since 1970.

This growth of our prison system comes at a sky-high cost. Collectively we spend over a quarter of a trillion dollars a year on the criminal justice system. Yet the individual expense is in many ways greater—destroying potential, swelling despair, and diminishing possibilities for rehabilitation. But perhaps the cruelest cost is the hardship these policies pose on the families of the incarcerated—and the 2.7 million children in this country who are growing up with a parent in prison.

This challenge is well beyond the authority of this Commission, but it is finally getting the notice it deserves. There is now a bipartisan effort on Capitol Hill working to reexamine federal sentencing laws and mandatory minimums. And just this week more than 130 police chiefs, prosecutors, and sheriffs joined the fray and added their voice to the call to reduce our nation's incarceration rate.

But there is also something this Commission can do. We can address the outrageous rates that too many families of prison inmates pay for phone service. Inmates are often separated from their families by hundreds of miles, and families may lack the time and means to make regular visits. Phone calls are the only way to stay connected. But when the price of a single phone call can be as much as most of us spend for unlimited monthly plans, it is hard to stay in touch. This is not just a strain on the household budget. It harms the families and children of the incarcerated—and it harms all of us because regular contact with kin can reduce recidivism.

We have taken steps before to reduce the cost of these calls. We continue on this course today. We put in place firm caps to prevent unreasonable charges for inmate calls. In addition, we take action to limit so-called ancillary service charges and prohibit flat-rate calling. These practices may not only run afoul of the law, they can impose unfair costs on prisoners and their families.

The arc of history is long, but we are going to bend it toward justice. And when we finally do we will owe credit to my colleague Commissioner Clyburn, who has been unwavering in her effort to right this wrong. We will also need to credit Martha Wright, who passed away last year, but whose fight to stay in contact with her grandson brought this problem to our attention. There is no better way to honor her legacy than to finally fix the criminal cost for too many families to simply stay in touch—and this effort has my full support.