

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

HOUSE PERMANENT SELECT
COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

CHIEF DEPUTY WHIP

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1309

5533 N. BROADWAY, SUITE 2
CHICAGO, IL 60640
Telephone: 773-506-7100
Fax: 773-506-9202

1852 JOHNS DRIVE
GLENVIEW, IL 60025
Telephone: 847-328-3409
Fax: 847-328-3425

October 21, 2015

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

RE: Comment for WC Docket 12-375

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

I appreciate the opportunity to submit comments to the Federal Communications Commission's Proposed Rulemaking (WC Docket No. 12-375) on Inmate Calling Services. I urge you to adopt the proposed comprehensive reform of intrastate, interstate, and international Inmate Calling Services to address the unreasonable costs of communication for inmates and their families. The proposed rule would establish caps on the cost of telephone calls made on an intrastate and international basis, adding to the current interstate authority. While I would prefer calls to cost even less, this is an important step forward.

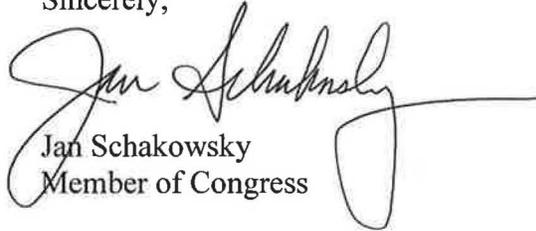
Lowering phone rates for inmates is not only a matter of fairness; it is a matter of public interest. Studies consistently find that incarcerated individuals who maintain close contact with family members while incarcerated have better post-release outcomes and lower recidivism rates. Given the evidence, it should be a priority to make communication with family available and affordable.

The high cost of prison phone calls is also a significant barrier and financial burden to families who want maintain contact with an incarcerated loved one. Research has shown the fees associated with staying in touch with a loved one are paid mostly by family members, with female family members bearing most of the cost. More than one in three (43%) families with an incarcerated family member went into debt to cover the cost of staying in contact with that family member. This is a particular burden for women who find themselves struggling to meet the needs of their families. In addition, the lack of contact with an incarcerated parent may have long-term impacts on children. More than 27 million children living in the United States have an incarcerated parent. For many of them, telephone calls may be the only way to maintain a relationship with a parent who is incarcerated many miles away.

Champaign County, Illinois operates a system that proves it is possible to provide inexpensive and efficient phone services to inmates. Not only has the County been able to maintain low phone service costs by eliminating commissions, it has been able to expand communications options by offering video visitations. This example proves there is no justification for the exorbitant cost of phone calls currently faced by inmates.

I urge you to adopt the Proposed Rulemaking on Inmate Calling Services and to improve outcomes for incarcerated individuals by lowering the prohibitive cost of Inmate Calling Services. Doing so would be in the best interests of inmates, their families and, by reducing recidivism rates and improving post-release outcomes, the community at large.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jan Schakowsky", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress