

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 15, 2020

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

We write to urge the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to immediately call on telecommunications providers serving law enforcement facilities across the nation to provide free phone calls and video visitations to incarcerated and detained individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We applaud the FCC's efforts to encourage traditional providers to bolster connectivity for Americans impacted by the coronavirus, most notably through the *Keep Americans Connected Pledge*; however, this effort does not adequately reflect the dynamics of prison and jail telecommunication systems. The FCC must do more to bring needed relief to incarcerated individuals and their families, many of whom are already facing increased economic hardship due to the coronavirus pandemic and forced to choose between communicating with a loved one and paying their bills.

Incarcerated individuals and law enforcement staff are at increased risk of COVID-19 infection due to a lack of practical opportunities for social distancing; thus the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) and many state, county and local law enforcement entities have suspended in-person visits between inmates and loved ones to combat the spread of infection. While the recently enacted Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, allows federal facilities to offer free phone calls and video visitation, which BOP implemented last week, many non-federal law enforcement entities are unable to waive or reduce communication costs for inmates and their families in a timely manner without agreement from their service providers. The FCC is uniquely positioned to seek commitments from these providers in the same spirit as the *Keep Americans Connected Pledge* to help address a public health issue for inmates and law enforcement personnel while preserving safety and security at law enforcement facilities and ensuring just and reasonable communications for inmates and their families.

Ensuring that families of inmates have an affordable and reliable way to communicate with their loved ones is essential to balancing the health and safety dynamics inside correctional and detention facilities during this pandemic. While we commend those facilities that are already exploring ways to offer free or reduced-cost communications in an extremely challenging environment, the FCC's leadership in this space can go a long way towards expanding these efforts.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

/s/ Tammy Duckworth

TAMMY DUCKWORTH
United States Senate

/s/ Rob Portman

ROB PORTMAN
United States Senate

/s/ Edward J. Markey

EDWARD J. MARKEY
United States Senate

/s/ Tom Udall

TOM UDALL
United States Senate

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate

/s/ Cory A. Booker

CORY A. BOOKER
United States Senate

/s/ Brian Schatz

BRIAN SCHATZ
United States Senate

/s/ Ron Wyden

RON WYDEN
United States Senate

/s/ Mazie K. Hirono

MAZIE K. HIRONO
United States Senate

/s/ Bernard Sanders

BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senate

/s/ Richard J. Durbin

RICHARD J. DURBIN
United States Senate

/s/ Tina Smith

TINA SMITH
United States Senate

/s/ Amy Klobuchar

AMY KLOBUCHAR
United States Senate

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.

ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.
United States Senate

/s/ Elizabeth Warren

ELIZABETH WARREN
United States Senate

/s/ Kamala D. Harris

KAMALA D. HARRIS
United States Senate

/s/ Angus S. King, Jr.

ANGUS S. KING, JR.
United States Senate

/s/ Sherrod Brown

SHERROD BROWN
United States Senate

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand

KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND
United States Senate

CC: The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel, Commissioner
The Honorable Michael O’Rielly, Commissioner
The Honorable Brendan Carr, Commissioner
The Honorable Geoffrey Starks, Commissioner