

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Modernization of Payphone Compensation Rules*, WC Docket No. 17-141; *Implementation of the Pay Telephone Reclassification and Compensation Provisions of the Telecommunications Act of 1996*, CC Docket No. 96-128; *2016 Biennial Review of Telecommunications Regulations*, WC Docket No. 16-132.

It can be difficult to find a payphone anymore. There's one in the hallway here—but hey, we're the Federal Communications Commission. Just about everywhere else, the ascendancy of mobile devices and increase in site-specific restrictions have combined to render the service less necessary and more antiquated.

For this reason, I support today's Order, which removes outdated requirements for the carriers that connect to payphones. This reduces the cost of carrier compliance in a manner consistent with Section 276 of the law.

There is one place, however, where payphones remain essential. That is in prisons. For those who are incarcerated and their loved ones, talk does not come not cheap. Inmates are often separated from their families by hundreds of miles, and families may lack the time and means to make regular visits. So calls from payphones are the only way to stay connected. But the price of individual calls can be as much as most of us pay for unlimited monthly plans. This makes it hard for the families of prisoners to stay in touch. This is not just a strain on the household budget. It is a cruel strain on the millions of families and children of the incarcerated—and it harms all of us because regular contact with kin can reduce recidivism.

This agency should be ashamed. Fifteen years ago, Martha Wright filed a petition calling on the FCC to do something about the exorbitant rates charged to inmates and their families. But it took this agency nearly a decade before launching a proceeding to do so. Over the course of a handful of years and as many orders, the FCC gave it a shot. We put in place limits on usurious rates and brought to an end some of the most abusive fees tacked on to the cost of every call. But last year the FCC gave up and refused to even defend this effort in court.

There is something profoundly wrong here. The moral compass of this agency is broken. We can fix this problem—it is within our power and capacity. We only need to exercise our influence and do something about it. And we should.