

**STATEMENT OF
ACTING CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Promoting Technological Solutions to Combat Contraband Wireless Device Use in Correctional Facilities*, GN Docket No. 13-111

Imagine receiving a threatening call. You are told to pay up and if you don't, someone in your family will get hurt . . . or worse. These are the kinds of calls that were made to the parents of Ryan Rust, when he was incarcerated in Alabama. As *The New York Times* described the situation last year, the demands began with small dollar amounts and escalated quickly. They were told that failure to respond would lead to torture and eventually death. The calls became so frequent and the threats so outrageous, the family feared for their safety.

But the Rust story is hardly unique. That's because these kinds of blackmail schemes are happening in prisons and jails across the country. They often start when one inmate realizes that another has someone on the outside depositing money into their commissary account to buy things like toothpaste or deodorant. Sometimes they begin when an inmate falls into debt to another, with interest rates that compound exponentially. Regardless of how they get going, the result is the same. The incarcerated person is threatened or beaten into turning over information about potential extortion targets on the outside—names, phone numbers, home addresses, places of work—and then the calls begin. They take place at all hours of day and night. Families fearing for the safety of their incarcerated kin often pay up and then find the threats ratchet up along with the fear that their loved ones may pay with their lives.

To make these schemes work requires one thing: contraband cell phones. They are smuggled in by inmates, taken from employees, thrown over walls, and even flown in by drone. Combatting their availability and use is a serious challenge for corrections department officials. Because despite efforts to identify and confiscate contraband phones, with everything from cell searches to phone-sniffing dogs, these devices still make their way in, making it possible for these extortion schemes to take place.

The action we take today is designed to help them stop. It sets up a streamlined system for corrections department officials to use certified contraband interdiction systems to identify where contraband phones may be in use and request that wireless carriers have them deactivated. This builds on previous FCC efforts and responds to the explanatory statement in last year's appropriations legislation directing us to adopt rules to require wireless carriers to disable contraband devices upon proper identification.

But we're not stopping here. That's because we're also seeking comment on further updates to our rules and the potential for other systems to help us combat the proliferation of contraband phones, to the extent they are permitted under the Communications Act of 1934.

Addressing this problem is not easy. The incentive to bring these devices into prisons and jails will not simply go away with better contraband interdiction systems in place. These underlying problems need to be addressed. However, we will continue to update our policies, consistent with the law, to help stop the kind of abuse the Rust family faced and help this troubling extortion come to an end.