

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

Re: *Rates for Interstate Inmate Calling Services*, WC Docket No. 12-375, Fourth Report and Order and Sixth Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (September 29, 2022)

50 years of research into the impact of incarceration is clear: contact by phone and other forms of visitation between incarcerated individuals and their families reduce recidivism and have positive effects for both the incarcerated individual, his or her family, and the public.¹ Yet, we still continue to fight against restrictive conduct by providers that constrains incarcerated individuals from access to the outside world.

For incarcerated individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, or who have speech disabilities, contact with loved ones can be even more challenging. Today, we take an important step in the right direction of ensuring that these individuals have functionally equivalent means of communication that is equal to their peers. We must ensure that those who need services such as Video Relay Services and Captioned Telephone Services are receiving those resources in their facilities. Failure to do so ensures that these individuals will continue to effectively be forced to live, as former incarcerated individual Alphonso Taylor described it, in “solitary confinement.” I hope we move quickly to apply this obligation to all facilities with incarcerated individuals, and eliminate the requirement that it only applies to those in jurisdictions with an average daily population of 50 or more.

Additionally, this item seeks comment on other improvements to our inmate calling rules. I continue to support ensuring that rates for incarcerated individuals are just and reasonable. Moreover, I am also glad to see a continued push for an improved data collection to help us move forward toward appropriate rate caps. Previous collections have been subpar, and we must ensure that we have strong data to appropriately act.

I would like to thank the Commission staff for their hard work on this item. I would also like to take this time to thank Senators Tammy Duckworth, Rob Portman, Cory Booker, and Brian Schatz, who introduced a bipartisan bill earlier this year, similarly focused on ensuring just and reasonable charges for our nation’s incarcerated population. I appreciate their leadership on this issue. I approve.

¹ Leah Wang, “Research Roundup: The Positive impacts of family contact for incarcerated people and their families”, Prison Policy Initiative, Dec. 21, 2021, https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/12/21/family_contact/.