

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER BRENDAN CARR**

Re: *Incarcerated People's Communications Services; Implementation of the Martha Wright-Reed Act*, WC Docket No. 23-62; *Rates for Interstate Inmate Calling Services*, WC Docket No. 12-375, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and Order (March 16, 2023).

Over the last few years, I've had the chance to hear directly from families who have experienced firsthand the difficulties of maintaining contact with their incarcerated loved ones. I've also listened to formerly incarcerated individuals who underscored the decline in mental and emotional health that can result from a lack of external communications.

Indeed, studies have repeatedly shown just how vital increased communication between incarcerated people and their families, friends, and other outside resources is and that these types of connections also help reduce recidivism rates. This is no coincidence. Successful reintroduction to society largely turns on having a meaningful support network, including access to job and housing resources.

A big part of enabling this increased communication is ensuring that providers are limited to charging just and reasonable rates for inmate calling services. But the marketplace for these services has long been broken—providers face no competition and market forces do not operate to constrain the charges they pass along to consumers.

The FCC has had a critical role to play in regulating certain aspects of this marketplace, and it has taken actions to address providers' abusive practices. But courts have turned aside several FCC actions that they deemed in excess of agency authority. With that string of D.C. Circuit decisions, the FCC has been unable to alter the status quo, despite broad consensus on the types of reforms that are necessary.

For this reason, I welcomed Congress' passage of the Martha Wright-Reed Act, which provides the FCC with the authority to establish rules for intrastate and international prison calls, as well as for a broader range of advanced communications services.

This will be increasingly important as more incarcerated individuals rely on video communications to stay in touch with their family, friends, and other important resources, such as attorneys and medical professionals.

As we move to implement the Martha Wright-Reed Act, I am hopeful that we will do a top-to-bottom review of the costs borne today by the families of incarcerated individuals. This proceeding presents a unique opportunity to think outside of the box and explore new ways of ensuring that the rates charged are just and reasonable. This includes exploring the role that site commissions play in the rates charged and whether the Commission can and should do more to address those charges, which can add to the cost of providing services inside correctional facilities.

The Martha Wright-Reed Act also requires the Commission to ensure that these advanced communications services are accessible to incarcerated individuals with disabilities, including those with hearing or speech loss. This remains an important issue for the FCC and I hope we move expeditiously to ensure that all incarcerated individuals have equal and affordable access to equivalent communications services in prisons and jails.

This item will have a meaningful impact on incarcerated individuals and their families and friends, so I want to thank the Wireline Competition Bureau for their work on this item. And I want to thank the Wright Petitioners for their diligent work to bring these issues to light and for their efforts over this now two decade long fight.

The item has my support.