

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

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10.23.15

After months of deliberation, the Federal Communications Commission yesterday adopted an order that caps rates for local and in-state long-distance calls from prisons and bans abusive fees.

While contact between inmates and their loved ones has been shown to reduce the rate of recidivism, high inmate calling rates have made that contact unaffordable for many families, who often live in poverty, the FCC said in a statement yesterday.

Reducing the cost of these calls measurably increases the amount of contact between inmates and their loved ones, making an important contribution to the criminal justice reforms sweeping the nation.

The decision caps the maximum cost of a 15-minute intrastate or local call at \$1.65 and lowers the per-minute rate. It also bans flat-rate calling, whereby providers charge a flat rate for a call up to 15 minutes regardless of actual call duration.

The FCC also cut its existing cap on interstate long-distance calls by up to 50 percent and barred or strictly limited the add-on fees and charges imposed by prison phone service providers, which the FCC said can increase the cost of families staying in touch by phone with loved ones who are incarcerated by as much as 40 percent.

The new rules affect inmates in federal and state prisons, as well as immigration detention centers. They also apply to local jails, though the rate caps are higher in smaller facilities.

Millions of incarcerated Americans and their loved ones will now see an end to exorbitant phone fees that have long been imposed by companies with monopolies on connecting people in prison to the outside world.

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