



NEWS

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.
See MCI v. FCC, 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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COMMISSION RULING OPENS DOOR FOR LOW-COST CALL ROUTING SERVICE FOR INMATES AND THEIR FAMILIES

Bureau Action Follows Comprehensive Reforms by FCC to Reduce Exorbitant Inmate Calling Rates

Washington, D.C. – Families of prison inmates should enjoy new options for reducing the high cost of phone calls to loved ones in jails and prisons, due to action taken today by the FCC’s Wireline Competition Bureau.

In a Declaratory Ruling, the Bureau finds that Inmate calling service providers are not allowed to unilaterally block innovative call routing services offered in the broad marketplace. The Bureau ruling follows comprehensive action taken by the Commission to bar high rates for long-distance calls in jails and prisons nationwide.

These actions are likely to facilitate increased contact between inmates and their loved ones. Studies have shown that contact between inmates and their families and communities can reduce the rate of recidivism, which in turn provides benefits to society overall.

“This Declaratory Ruling represents yet another step by the FCC toward making the cost of inmate calling more reasonable,” said Acting FCC Chairwoman Mignon Clyburn. “Clarifying that these innovative services may not be blocked opens the door to affordable alternatives that spouses, parents and children can use to stay in touch with loved ones in prison. As studies have amply demonstrated, this kind of ongoing contact can help an inmate return to society as a productive citizen.”

Inmate calling service rates are generally much higher than public payphone rates, and rates for inmate long-distance calls are often higher than for local calls. In 2008, a service called ConsCallHome enabled families to subscribe to a Voice over Internet Protocol calling service that allowed inmates to place a lower cost prison pay phone call to a local number, which ConsCallHome would then route over the Internet to families living far away, avoiding the expense of a high-cost long-distance call.

Inmate calling service provider Securus Technologies blocked ConsCallHome, arguing that Commission precedent permitted such blocking, and sought a ruling from the FCC on the issue. The Bureau found that the Commission precedent cited by Securus was not applicable in this context.

While Securus stopped blocking ConsCallHome earlier this year pursuant to a merger commitment, the Bureau ruling explains why blocking this type of service does not fall within exceptions from the

Commission's general policies against call blocking in the event other inmate calling service providers attempt to use this rationale for blocking ConsCallHome and similar services.

The Declaratory Ruling is available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DA-13-1990A1.pdf

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