I strongly support the proposed action to ensure just and reasonable ICS rates for interstate, long-distance calling at privately- and publicly-administered correctional facilities because of the following public policy consideration.

I. Public Policy Considerations – Lifer Parole Determinations

Access to reasonable long distance calling rates has an important effect on parole decisions for people serving life with the possibility of parole because it allows them to develop and maintain outside relationships—networks which are a key factor in determining parole eligibility.

When an inmate serving a life sentence with the possibility of parole reaches parole eligibility, a hearing is conducted to determine whether parole is appropriate. An important factor considered in these hearings is the inmate’s “parole plans, including where an inmate would live and support themselves if they were released.” Specifically, parole officers ask where and with whom the inmates will live, and how they will support themselves. Because of the long length of sentences for life crimes, these inmates often find adjusting to life outside of prison to be difficult, and they lack the knowledge of current job markets necessary to find good employment quickly. Therefore, parole officers rely heavily on whether the inmate has family members or other close relations who can help the inmate adjust by providing lodging, links to local employment, and general support and advice.

Having participated in a parole hearing for an inmate originally from another state, I have seen firsthand how important the strength of these outside links is in the board’s determination of whether parole is appropriate. Just, reasonable access to long distance calls is a vital part of maintaining these outside relationships—indeed, for many inmates housed far from their families and home communities, it is the only way to maintain those relationships.

Helping more inmates become eligible for parole will reduce the extreme overcrowding in correctional facilities that currently plagues our justice system. This important concern, grounded in the Eighth Amendment’s protection against cruel and unusual punishment, counterbalances concerns for the economic hardships a rate cap or other regulation may impose on telephone service providers.

---

In this regard, the Alternative Wright Petition is the most just, as it will provide all inmates, regardless of ability to pay, with a certain amount of calling time each month that they can use to build or bolster their connections with the outside world. However, other proposals, such as uniform rate caps, will also greatly expand access to the calls inmates require to maintain outside connections, and will greatly aid those seeking to prove their eligibility and readiness for parole.