

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Rates for Interstate Inmate Calling Services*, WC Docket No. 12-375

Justice delayed is justice denied.

That is not yet the case with prison payphones—but we are perilously close.

Thirteen years ago, Martha Wright filed a petition calling on the Commission to do something about the exorbitant rates charged to inmates and their families. Shamefully, it took this agency nearly a decade before launching a proceeding to address their plight. But over the course of the last four years in three separate orders the Commission put in place a series of policies to reduce calling rates and limit ancillary charges. This is progress.

Still, there is something wrong that it has taken this long. There is something wrong that after all this time we are still calibrating rate caps, considering site commissions, and adjusting permissible fees. There is something wrong that today we are still picking up the pieces and stitching them together in advance of yet another visit to the courts to address the outrageous rates too many families pay just to stay in touch.

Count me as tired. Tired that we are still at this. Tired because we know that inmates are often separated from their families by hundreds of miles, and families may lack the time and means to make regular visits. Phone calls are the only way to stay connected. But when the price of a single phone call can be as much as most of us spend for unlimited monthly plans, it can be hard to stay in touch. This is not just a strain on the household budget. It harms the families and children of the incarcerated—and it harms all of us because regular contact with kin can reduce recidivism.

We should care about this—because the United States is home to the largest incarcerated population in the world, with 2.2 million people in our prisons and jails. No other country comes even close. Collectively we spend over a quarter of a trillion dollars a year to keep our criminal justice system in place. But that understates the real cost—swelling despair, destroyed potential, and diminished possibilities for rehabilitation.

More is wrong here than just the usurious cost of phone calls for the incarcerated. But this is the one thing this Commission can fix. So I support today's effort, but think we are due for some speed. Credit to my colleague Commissioner Clyburn for getting this started, but we are nowhere if we do not finish it—and justice requires that we do.