

October 6, 2021

The Honorable Chairman Michael F. Doyle  
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ranking Member Robert E. Latta  
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Doyle and Ranking Member Latta:

The undersigned grassroots advocates, and civil rights, consumer rights and faith-based organizations thank you for the opportunity to express our strong support for H.R. 2489, the Martha Wright Prison Phone Justice Act, which would eliminate predatory calling rates for incarcerated people in the United States. We ask that this letter be entered into the record of the October 6, 2021 hearing entitled “Strengthening Our Communications Networks to Meet the Needs of Consumers.”

Policymakers on both sides of the aisle acknowledge that the cost of communications in correctional facilities is deeply unjust. In an era of unlimited cell phone plans and near constant connectivity, some families have spent up to \$1 per minute and one-third of families with incarcerated loved ones went into debt just to stay in touch.<sup>1</sup> These astronomical rates prevent an incarcerated person from maintaining contact with their family, clergy, and counsel. This is not just untenable, but a cruel injustice that cannot be allowed to continue.

Addressing the pressing need for more just and reasonable rates also would enhance incarcerated people's ability to maintain and build connections with their communities, thus increasing reliable support structures and improving reentry outcomes.<sup>2</sup> And yet, a decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit<sup>3</sup> derailed previous decades-long efforts by the Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) to take action.

The Martha Wright Prison Phone Justice Act would get the FCC’s reforms back on track. The bill would immediately set an affordable interim rate cap, set caps on predatory fees, and require

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<sup>1</sup> See Saneta deVuono-powell et al., Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, *Forward Together, and Research Action Design, Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families* 9 (2015), <http://whopaysreport.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Who-Pays-FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> See Ryan Shanahan & Sandra Villalobos Agudelo, *The Family and Recidivism*, American Jails (Sept. 2012), <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/vera/the-family-and-recidivism.pdf>; Joan Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry* 246 (2006).

<sup>3</sup> See *GTL v. FCC*, 866 F.3d 397 (D.C. Cir. 2017).

the FCC to take swift and consistent action to protect consumers going forward in a technology-neutral manner. It would also prohibit unapproved fees and charges and end site commissions, one of the ways in which correctional agencies have taken advantage of incarcerated people and their families to generate revenue.

This bill is named in honor of Ms. Martha Wright-Reed, a grandmother who was forced to choose between purchasing medication and keeping in touch with her incarcerated grandson. She campaigned for decades to lower the cost of calls for incarcerated people and their loved ones. No other grandmother or family member should ever have to choose between their health and keeping in touch with their loved ones.

We urge you to move swiftly and take the necessary steps to enact the Martha Wright Prison Phone Justice Act.

Sincerely,

ADAPT	Legislative Advocate of the Iowa
Advocates for Change	Annual Conference of the United
Alabama C.U.R.E.	Methodist Church
American Friends Service Committee	LIFE Progressive Services Group Inc
Asian Americans Advancing Justice   AAJC	LightSeeker
Center for Democracy & Technology	Louisiana Parole Project
Coalition For Prisoners Rights	Media Alliance
Color of Change	MediaJustice
Colorado-CURE, Inc.	MI-CURE
Common Cause	Michigan Citizens for Justice
Communications Workers of America	NARSOL
Community Alliance on Prisons	National Consumer Law Center (on behalf
Community Unity In Action	of its low-income clients)
Consider It Done!	National CURE
Cure-Sort	Open Access Connections
End Solitary Santa Cruz County (CA, US)	OpenMedia
FAMM	Organization for Black Struggle
Fight for the Future	Partners in Healthy Communities
Free Press Action	Prison Fellowship
Friends of Restorative Justice of	Prison Justice Network
Washtenaw County	Prison Policy Initiative
Hallelujah Tailors	Prisons and Justice Initiative
Hawai'i Friends of Restorative Justice	Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty
Hawaii Health and Harm Reduction Center	PsySR, SWASC, CIIS
Heartland Zen (St. Louis, MO)	R.I.H.D.
Hep Free Hawaii	ReThink Justice DC

Social Workers and Allies Against Solitary  
Confinement (SWASC)  
Soul Solutions, LLC.  
Team G.O.A.T  
The Community  
The Episcopal Church  
Tiger Prison Project  
US Representative of Washington DC  
USPA  
UV4SOR  
Virginia CURE  
Virginia Justice for Life  
Visionary V  
Voqal  
Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil  
Rights and Urban Affairs  
Working Narratives  
Worth Rises

Individuals

Alexis Abraham  
B Albert, CURE

Joseph Baltar  
Jerry Bartlett  
Linda Burke, CURE  
Frances Collins, CURE  
Eldon Dillingham, Retired  
Joan Dworkin, Retired Professor,  
Sacramento State University  
Ken & Geraldine Grunow  
Michael Hamden, Attorney at Law (retired)  
Donald Hause  
Arax Krahling, CURE  
Donna Lampkin, concerned parents  
Jaime McBrady, CURE  
Mariposa McCall, Va  
Sister Mary Ann McGivern, member, Sisters  
of Loretto  
Sandi Meyer, CURE  
Helen Molanphy, CURE  
Jim Mustin  
Ida Nissen, CURE  
Sean O'Brien, Attorney at Law  
Sisto Ramirez