

**STATEMENT OF  
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

Re: *Incarcerated People's Communications Services; Implementation of the Martha Wright-Reed Act*, WC Docket No. 23-62; *Rates for Interstate Inmate Calling Services*, WC Docket No. 12-375, Report and Order, Order on Reconsideration, Clarification and Waiver, and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (July 18, 2024).

For more than a decade, this Commission has endeavored to lower the cost of communication services for incarcerated persons. Rightfully so. For far too long, our efforts have been stymied by incomplete authority. Congress recognized the need to correct this oversight on a bipartisan, unanimous basis, and passed the Martha Wright-Reed Just and Reasonable Communications Act. Signed into law last year, this historic legislation empowered the Commission to continue its work in setting just and reasonable rates for incarcerated people's communication services.

Today's Order completes this task. In the rates set forth, we ensure that incarcerated persons and their loved ones will pay no more than 12 cents a minute to make a phone call, and far less in many cases. But we know connection doesn't just happen over the phone, which is why we also set interim rates for video communication services. These audio and video rates apply regardless if you are calling an incarcerated loved one in the town over or across state lines. Importantly, we end the practice of provider kickbacks to correctional facilities and payments for costs irrelevant to providing services so callers will no longer be forced to bear the financial burden of these costs.

We also take important steps to strengthen access to communication services for incarcerated persons with disabilities. The Order requires that providers make services accessible to people with disabilities and extends rate protections to all such communication services and technologies used now or in the future.

The rules we adopt today not only cap the rate for communication services for incarcerated individuals, they also establish important consumer protections for users of these services. Consumers will now be able to easily access information on the rates and charges of services, as well as information on accounts, billing, and refunds on a service providers' public website. By increasing transparency and requiring these disclosures from IPCS providers, we enable consumers to make informed decisions when seeking to communicate with their incarcerated loved ones.

It is no secret that the market for communication services for incarcerated people has long been plagued by predatory fees and practices. Today's actions put an end to these abuses. This Order goes a step further and puts another tool in our enforcement toolbox by establishing a complaint pathway for whistleblowers to report suspected violations. Doing so will enable our Enforcement Bureau to swiftly identify, investigate, and address potential violations. I want to thank the Chairwoman for incorporating my edits on this matter.

Mrs. Martha Wright-Reed led the fight to make communication services affordable for incarcerated persons as a result of her struggles to afford to communicate with her incarcerated grandson. She carried the torch for this cause until her passing in 2015. This Order honors her years of work and the struggles faced by millions of incarcerated persons to stay connected. Her spirit guided the legislation and our rules today. Today, we must also honor the hard work of former Commissioner Mignon Clyburn who carried on this fight.

I know years of hard work has gone into this proceeding to bring today's item into fruition. For that, I want to thank the Wireline Competition Bureau and all staff involved for their good work. This item has my full support.