



STATE OF MINNESOTA
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September 23, 2016

Paul Wright, Executive Director
Human Rights Defense Center
P.O. Box 1151
Lake Worth, FL 33460

Dear Mr. Wright:

This week Minnesota Attorney General Lori Swanson led a multi-state coalition in filing the attached Amicus Brief in support of FCC rules to reform predatory telephone rates for inmate phone calls.

We are aware that your organization filed comments with the FCC on the matter and thought you may be interested in this.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Benjamin Wogsland", written over a large, stylized blue oval.

Benjamin Wogsland
(651) 296-2069





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Contact: Ben Wogsland (651) 296-2069

AG SWANSON LEADS MULTI-STATE COALITION IN LEGAL BRIEF OPPOSING PREDATORY PRICING OF PHONE CALLS FROM INMATES TO FAMILY

*Studies Show Telephone Contact With Family and Outside Support Improves Chances of
Rehabilitation and Promotes Public Safety*

Attorney General Lori Swanson today lead a multi-state coalition filing an Amicus Brief with the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia in support of new federal rules that limit the rates that can be charged for phone calls between incarcerated individuals and their families, friends, clergy, and outside supporters.

Phone companies that contract with prisons and jails to provide phone service have a captive market, allowing them to charge exorbitant rates and fees that can add up to \$8 per minute. While one national phone company offers regular customers unlimited local and long-distance calling for \$32.99 per month, some families of inmates report paying prison phone companies *fifteen times* that, or \$500 per month, according to the brief.

“Telephone contact between incarcerated individuals and family, friends, and others helps to establish the support mechanisms necessary for offenders to succeed after their release, promotes public safety, improves outcomes for offenders’ children, and assists in the creation of stable families,” Swanson wrote in the brief.

Since most inmates are housed in facilities at least 100 miles from their homes, telephone calls remain one of the primary ways for families to remain connected during incarceration. Yet, the cost of prison phone calls has long been a roadblock to regular contact between incarcerated individuals and family and other outside support. The cost of telephone contact was cited by nearly 40 percent of jail inmates and their families as a “significant barrier to communication.”

The brief cites numerous studies showing that telephone contact between inmates and family and outside support during incarceration is associated with lower recidivism rates and higher success rates for post-incarceration rehabilitation and employment.

“These predatory rates have resulted in families using substantial portions of their monthly incomes to maintain telephone contact with loved ones,” Swanson wrote in the brief. A mother who lives on a \$900 monthly disability check reported paying more than 20 percent of her monthly income to keep in touch with her mentally ill son. A grandmother reported paying \$1,000 a year to talk to her grandson.

Over 2.7 million children in the United States are estimated to have a parent behind bars. One incarcerated Minnesota father told the FCC that:

“I want to be able to raise my child even if it’s over the phone for the time being. I would love to be in her life as much as possible, but it’s hard to do so when the phone [price] is steadily climbing higher and higher. I know I’m paying my debt to society for my crime, but I need to stay in contact with family.”

“States have a significant interest in breaking the cycle of recidivism. Reduced recidivism means fewer victims of crime and reduced public expense from incarceration,” Swanson wrote in the brief, which was joined by the states of New Mexico, Illinois, Washington, New York, and Massachusetts, as well as Washington D.C.

The Federal Communication Commission (“FCC”) issued an order banning exorbitant fees and limiting telephone rates from state and federal prisons to 13 cents per minute and jails to between 19 and 31 cents per minute depending on size. The FCC order also banned numerous fees, such as connection charges, and limited other fees to the actual cost of delivering the service. The billion dollar prison phone system industry sued to block the new rules, and the matter is now pending before the appeals court.