



California Public Utilities Commission
505 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE

Media Contact: Terrie Prosper, 415.703.1366, news@cpuc.ca.gov

CPUC TO CONSIDER REGULATING COSTS OF PHONE CALLS FROM CALIFORNIA PRISONS

SAN FRANCISCO, October 8, 2020 - The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) today said it will consider regulating telecommunications services used by incarcerated people and their families in the state of California.

The proceeding opened today will consider how to ensure incarcerated people and their families have access to affordable communications services. Most incarcerated people cannot choose their own calling provider which, combined with unrestricted rates, often results in exorbitant phone bills for those incarcerated, including minors, and for their families. In some jurisdictions, a local 15-minute phone call can run as high as \$26.75. The same phone call from a juvenile facility can cost as much as \$13.65.

In opening the new Rulemaking, the CPUC acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed many pre-existing inequalities, making communication services more of a lifeline and creating challenges for disadvantaged communities. Rate changes to make phone calls more affordable for incarcerated people are essential to ensure that they do not face increased financial burdens and retain the ability to stay connected to family. The proceeding will focus on how the CPUC regulates the rates, terms, and conditions of telecommunications services provided to incarcerated people in the state.

Commissioner Martha Guzman Aceves, who introduced the Rulemaking, said, “This summer has seen a great debate about the nature and the role of the criminal justice system in our society. There are no easy answers here, and reasonable minds can disagree. But I hope we can all agree on this: incarcerated people are people; they are Californians; they are ratepayers; they have not lost the legal



protections afforded to all ratepayers; and this Commission therefore has a legal obligation and—I think—a moral duty to ensure they are treated fairly.”

“This Order Instituting Rulemaking is necessary and timely. Placing undue financial burdens on incarcerated people and their families—which are disproportionately low-income and persons of color—is unacceptable. We must work to ensure incarcerated people and their families have access to affordable and fair service,” said CPUC President Marybel Batjer.

“Exorbitant calling rates for incarcerated people prevent them and their families from receiving the emotional support that comes from those familial bonds needed for personal recovery during a time when our country and world are suffering. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is doing its part on this vital issue by opening a Rulemaking on interstate incarcerated calling, but the FCC can’t regulate the 80 percent of the calls with incarcerated people that take place within a single state. Intrastate calling is under our purview rather than the federal government—that’s why the CPUC needed to take this important action,” said Commissioner Genevieve Shiroma.

Comments on the proceeding are due November 9, 2020, and reply comments are due November 19, 2020.

The wireline service providers ordered to respond in the proceeding include competitive local carriers, competitive local resellers, local exchange carriers interexchange carriers, interexchange resellers, and digital voice registrants.

On August 8, 2020, the FCC proposed to update its rate caps on out-of-state calls and urged state partners to take action to address the high in-state inmate calling service rates because the FCC lacked the authority to cap intrastate calling prices. The CPUC has not previously regulated the rates of telephone services provided to incarcerated people in California’s jails and prison. This new Rulemaking will be conducted under Article 6 of the CPUC's Rules of Practice and Procedure.

The proposal is available at:

<https://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Published/G000/M346/K826/346826387.PDF>.



The CPUC regulates services and utilities, protects consumers, safeguards the environment, and assures Californians' access to safe and reliable utility infrastructure and services. For more information on the CPUC, please visit www.cpuc.ca.gov.

###

