



Incarcerated People’s Communications Services

The FCC is working to rein in excessive rates and egregious fees on phone and video calls paid by families trying to stay in touch with loved ones serving time in jail or prison.

Communications options for incarcerated people are limited, which often results in unreasonably high costs for calls between incarcerated people and their families. Until recently, the FCC’s efforts to reduce the rates and fees for telephone calls in jails and prisons have been limited to phone calls between an incarcerated person and someone in a different state or a foreign country. The FCC did not have authority over in-state phone calls or over video calls.

New Legislation Expands FCC’s Authority over Incarcerated People’s Communications Services

In January 2023, the President signed bipartisan legislation giving the FCC authority to rein in the rates and fees for audio and video communications between incarcerated people and their loved ones, including communications between people in the same state. The law requires the Commission to implement new rules covering these expanded services sometime after July 2024, but before January 2025. In March 2023, [the FCC asked for public input on how to implement the new law.](#)

Rate caps for interstate and international telephone calls from prisons and jails

The interim rate caps, shown in the chart below, apply to all interstate and international telephone calls from correctional institutions, but do not apply to local, or in-state calls.

| Type of Facility | Maximum Total Interstate Rate Cap (per minute) | Maximum International Rate Cap (per minute) |
|--|--|---|
| Prisons | \$0.14* | \$0.14* plus the average amount the provider paid to send calls from the U.S. to the foreign country* |
| Jails with 1,000 or more incarcerated people | \$0.16* | \$0.16* plus the average amount the provider paid to send calls from the U.S. to the foreign country* |



| Type of Facility | Maximum Total Interstate Rate Cap (per minute) | Maximum International Rate Cap (per minute) |
|--|--|---|
| Jails with less than 1,000 incarcerated people | \$0.21 | \$0.21 plus the average amount the provider paid to send calls from the U.S. to the foreign country |

* These \$0.14 and \$0.16 caps include a \$0.02 per minute allowance for “site commissions” if the service provider pays a prison or jail for the right to serve that facility. Where the provider pays no site commissions, these caps are \$0.12 for prisons and \$0.14 for jails. Where a state or local law sets the site commission amount, the provider may pass that amount through to consumers, as long as the total amount billed to the consumer is no more than \$0.21 per minute.

These interim rates caps for interstate and international telephone calls were set in May 2021 (<https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-lowers-interstate-and-international-prison-phone-rates-0>).

Additional service charges

Providers often add additional service charges and fees. The FCC has limited both the types of charges and the amount that providers may assess on such interstate or international calls for incarcerated persons.

| Permitted Additional Service Charges | Monetary Cap Per Use / Instruction |
|--|--|
| Automated payment fees, | \$3.00 |
| Call fees for collect calls billed through third parties on a call-by-call basis. | \$3.00 per transaction, plus the effective, per-minute rate, when payment is through an automated payment system; \$5.95 per transaction, plus the effective, per-minute rate; when payment is through a live agent. |
| Live agent fees for phone payment or for an account set up with optional use of a live operator. | \$5.95 |
| Paper bill/statement fees (no charge is permitted for electronic bills/statements). | \$2.00 |
| Prepaid account funding minimums and maximums. | Provider may not institute prepaid account funding minimums or set prepaid account funding maximums under \$50. |

| Permitted Additional Service Charges | Monetary Cap Per Use / Instruction |
|---|--|
| Third-party financial transaction fees, such as MoneyGram, Western Union, credit card processing fees and transfers from third party commissary accounts. | \$3.00 per transaction, when payment is through an automated payment system; \$5.95 per transaction, when payment is through a live agent. |
| Applicable taxes and regulatory fees. | Provider may pass these charges through to consumers directly <i>with no markup</i> . |

These limits only apply to interstate and international calls. Consumers may have to pay additional service charges and higher fees in connection with calls between an incarcerated person and someone located in the same state.

Accessibility for incarcerated people with disabilities

Incarcerated people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities need access to [Telecommunications Relay Services \(TRS\)](#), and providers must provide access to traditional TTY-based TRS and Speech-to-Speech relay (STS). Beginning January 1, 2024, a provider serving a correctional facility in any jurisdiction with an average daily population of 50 or more incarcerated persons must provide access to all relay services eligible for TRS fund support in any correctional facility that is located where high-speed internet service is available and has not been prohibited by the correctional authority overseeing the facility. This includes the ability to place point-to-point video calls using American Sign Language (ASL). The additional relay services to be made available include video relay service (VRS), Internet Protocol Relay Service (IP Relay), and Internet Protocol Captioned Telephone Service (IP CTS). When access to broadband service is not available, providers must provide access to non-Internet Protocol Captioned Telephone Service (CTS), in addition to traditional TTY-based TRS and STS.

Additional rules to facilitate registration for and access to TRS by incarcerated people with disabilities are pending approval by the Office of Management and Budget as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act.

Restrictions on charging for accessibility services and devices

Per-minute rates for TTY-to-TTY calls are capped at 25 percent of the rates that providers charge for other phone calls involving incarcerated people because TTY calls, by their nature, are a longer duration than voice calls, and incarcerated people with disabilities do not have the alternative of placing voice calls. Providers are not allowed to collect a charge or fee from any party for using TRS or a device or service needed to access TRS, with certain exceptions: Providers can collect a charge for using CTS, IP CTS, or ASL point-to-point video, but the charge may not exceed the amount for a charge for a voice telephone call of the same duration, distance, jurisdiction, and time-of-day.

Other rules

No provider may block a collect call solely because the provider lacks a prior billing relationship with the called-party's telephone provider, unless the provider also offers debit, pre-paid, or pre-paid collect calling options.

FCC rules require providers to clearly, accurately, and conspicuously disclose their rates and additional service charges for all types of voice calls (interstate, intrastate, and international) on their websites or in another reasonable manner readily available to consumers.

FCC rules also require that, when an incarcerated person places a collect call, the provider must identify itself to the person receiving the call before connecting the call. The provider must also disclose how the receiving party can find out the rate that will be charged for that call before the call is connected. The service provider must permit the receiving party to terminate the telephone call at no charge before the call is connected.

Filing a complaint

If you feel you or a family member has been overcharged by a provider that serves jails, prisons or other correctional facilities, you can file a complaint with the FCC.

- File a complaint online at <https://consumercomplaints.fcc.gov>
- By phone: 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322); TTY: 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322); ASL 1-844-432-2275
- By mail (please include your name, address, contact information and as much detail about your complaint as possible):

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
45 L Street NE
Washington, DC 20554

States' Rules

States may have their own rules governing in-state calls to incarcerated people. To complain about alleged violations of state rules, contact the state public utility commission in the state where the call took place. State public utility commission contact information may be found at naruc.org/about-naruc/regulatory-commissions or in the government section of your local telephone directory.

Online Version

- Web link: https://www.fcc.gov/incarcerated-peoples_communications_services

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