

Inmate Telephone Service

Background

FCC rules that significantly reformed interstate Inmate Calling Service (ICS) rates and practices recently went into effect in an effort to stem undue high costs to inmates' families. In most cases, inmates' telephone calling options are limited to one or more of the following calling types: collect, debit account or pre-paid account. Also, incarcerated persons typically may not choose their long distance service provider. These factors, combined with unrestricted long-distance rates, often resulted in unreasonably high phone bills for inmates' families.

The following revised rules took effect on Feb. 11, 2014:

New Rate Caps for Interstate Collect Calls from Prisons

The FCC rate caps for interstate calls are:

- \$0.25 per minute for collect calls
- \$0.21 per minute for debit or pre-paid calls

The FCC also capped the total cost of a call between two states including per-call charges. Those caps are:

- \$3.75 for a 15-minute call
- \$3.15 for a 15-minute debit or pre-paid call

Charges on inmate calls placed after Feb. 11, 2014, that exceed the new interstate rate caps are in violation of federal rules.

Additional New Rules

In addition, providers of inmate calling services are now prohibited from assessing any additional charges or fees when the inmate must use Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) equipment. (TRS is a telephone service that allows persons with hearing or speech disabilities to place and receive telephone calls.) Read our TRS guide at www.fcc.gov/guides/telecommunications-relay-service-trs.

Moreover, no ICS provider may block a collect call solely because it 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 that, when an inmate places a collect call, each operator service provider (OSP) must identify itself to the person receiving the call before connecting the call. Each OSP must also disclose, before connecting the call, how the receiving party may obtain rate quotations. Additionally, the OSP must permit the receiving party to terminate the telephone call at no charge before the call is connected.

These rules apply only to interstate OSP calls.

Judicial Review of Other ICS Rules

On Jan. 13, 2014, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit issued a partial stay of the Order establishing the new ICS rules. Specifically, three of the rules ("Cost-Based Rates for Inmate Calling Services"; "Interim Safe Harbor"; and "Annual Reporting and Certification Requirement") are not in effect, pending further judicial review.

Filing a Complaint About Interstate ICS Rates

Complaints about interstate and international rates may be filed with the FCC. You can file your complaint using an FCC online complaint form found at www.fcc.gov/complaints. Please complete the online complaint form in full. When you open the online complaint form, follow the series of prompts that will take you to the section you need to complete.

You may also contact the FCC's Consumer Center directly by calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY; or faxing 1-866-418-0232; or you may file your complaint by writing to:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20554

Your complaint should include the following information:

- Your name, address, email address and phone number where you can be reached
- The name, phone number, city and state of the company that you are complaining about
- The amount of any disputed charges, whether you paid them, whether you received a refund or adjustment to your bill, the amount of any adjustment or refund you have received, an explanation if the disputed charges are related to services in addition to residential or business telephone services
- Details of your complaint and any additional relevant information

Filing a Complaint About Intrastate ICS Rates

Most states, however, have similar rules for intrastate (within a state) OSP calls. To complain about rates for intrastate collect calls from public phones in prisons, contact the state public utility commission in the state where the call originated and terminated. State public utility commission addresses may be found at www.naruc.org/commissions.cfm or in the blue pages or government section of your local telephone directory.

For More Information

Visit the FCC's Consumer Publications Library at www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/consumer-publications-library for information about this and other communications issues, or write to the address included above.

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