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# Congressional Black Caucus Chair Marcia Fudge seeks fair phone call rates for prison inmates

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - The Congressional Black Caucus, led by Rep. Marcia Fudge of Warrensville Heights, today asked the Federal Communications Commission to reduce the **exorbitant rates** (<http://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2013/02>



Warrensville Heights Democratic Rep. Marcia Fudge prepares to address a Capitol Hill news conference.

Sabrina Eaton/The Plain Dealer

[/fcc\\_considers\\_placing\\_cap\\_on\\_c.html](#)) that prisoners around the country are charged to make phone calls to their family members.

At a Capitol Hill news conference, Fudge said the charges can be as high as \$4 per call,

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plus an extra 55 cents per minute in long distance fees.

Black caucus members say that's unfair to financially strapped family members who end up paying the bills, and also hinders the successful rehabilitation of prisoners who are less likely to relapse into crime if they've got strong ties to their families.

"If they can communicate, the odds are much better that they will not be repeat offenders," said Fudge, who asked the FCC to eliminate the per-call charges for inmates and establish a "reasonable permanent cap" on their telephone rates.

CBC member Eleanor Holmes Norton, who represents the District of Columbia in Congress, said she felt a six-cent-per-minute rate for prison phone calls would be fair.

Late last year, the **FCC announced** (<http://www.fcc.gov/document/rates-interstate-inmate-calling-services>) it would consider establishing rules over the rates that prisoners can be charged for interstate phone calls. It does not have authority to regulate calls made within a state.

"There are well over two million children with at least one parent behind bars and regardless of their circumstances, both children and parents gain from regular contact with one another," said a statement released by FCC Commissioner Mignon L. Clyburn, whose father is South Carolina Democratic Congressman James Clyburn, a former Congressional Black Caucus chairman.

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio has capped the price phone companies can charge for calls at 36 cents per minute. The cost to initiate calls within the state can't be higher than \$2.75.

Federal Bureau of Prisons facilities charge a 23 cents-per-minute fee for long distance calls, and six cents for direct calls. A long-distance collect call is 40 cents a minute, plus a \$2.45 connection fee.

Prison phone calls at Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction facilities, as well as the Cuyahoga County Jail, are managed by Global Tel Link Corp. of Alabama, one of two companies around the country that handle the bulk of prison phone calls. It has a complicated price structure that depends on the time of day and distance from where the call is made. The costs for a collect call from a prisoner are assumed by the person who accepts the charges and would appear on their phone bill.

Ohio corrections department spokesman Mike Davis declined to comment on whether its rates are fair to prisoners. Global Tel Link **told the FCC** (<http://apps.fcc.gov/ecfs/document/view?id=7022289943>) its fees are justified because of the extra security measures required on inmate calls.

"There is no question that capping interstate inmate calling service rates based on the pricing for traditional long distance services provided to the general public would limit



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severely the availability of the enhanced public safety, security and investigative services correctional facilities demand," the company said.

CBC members maintain that prison operators want to keep the high rates because the phone company contracts boost their budgets. Global Tel Link pays Ohio \$15 million a year to handle prison communications, Davis said, which funds education, recovery services and inmate payroll.

Family members aren't the only ones who object to the high call rates. Local criminal defense attorney Stephen W. Wolf **told the FCC (<http://apps.fcc.gov/ecfs/document/view?id=7022121486>)** that the costs of receiving phone calls from his clients "cause a significant hindrance, and in many cases it completely stops the ability of a defendant to mount a defense."

"I am unable to absorb the high costs of calls from my clients in our county jail," said Wolf, who has offices in North Olmsted and Beachwood.

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