Dear Senators Duckworth, Booker, King, Markey, Portman, Schatz:

As nonprofit organizations and community members that support reforms of the criminal justice system to strengthen the ties between incarcerated people and their loved ones, we are proud to endorse the Martha Wright-Reed Just and Reasonable Communications Act of 2019, S.1764.

For more than fifteen years, families have been calling on the Federal Communications Commission ("FCC") to provide relief from the exorbitant costs that the prison phone companies impose just to stay in touch. But some children still have to pay over a $1/minute to talk to an incarcerated parent. Without regulation, these high costs persist because many prison systems, local jails and detention facilities award monopoly contracts to phone companies that charge the highest rates and therefore share the largest portion of the profits with the correctional institution.¹

While the Federal Communications Commission had made some progress toward capping rates and fees in recent years, the phone companies fought back, attacking the FCC’s jurisdiction over the cost of calls and fees and thereby dismantling most of the previously adopted regulation.²

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¹ For a detailed overview of the dysfunctional system see Please Deposit All of Your Money: Kickbacks, Rates, and Hidden Fees in the Jail Phone Industry by Drew Kukorowski, Peter Wagner and Leah Sakala (Prison Policy Initiative), May 8, 2013, available at https://www.prisonpolicy.org/phones/
Consistent with FCC Chairman Pai’s testimony in his confirmation hearing, the bill is
narrowly targeted to clarify the Federal Communications Commission’s jurisdiction. It
makes clear the FCC is required to ensure “just and reasonable” rates for consumers,
rather than only protecting phone company profits. The bill also clarifies that the Federal
Communications Commission’s authority is technology-neutral, which is particularly
timely as many of the companies are using new technology. For example, many
correctional facilities have expanded their use of video calling technology, which has not
only led to banning of in-person visits, but also threatens to circumvent regulation.

Unfortunately, too often, our nation’s criminal justice policies fail to recognize and
support the powerful and positive role families play in rehabilitation. This trend is not
only harmful to families trying to stay together during the hardship of incarceration; it is
also misguided correctional policy. Improving the ability of families, clergy and others to
maintain a relationship with incarcerated people improves the safety of all communities.
And yet visiting an incarcerated loved one is already difficult for many. Correctional
facilities are often located far away from people’s home communities, forcing families to
rely on phone calls to stay in touch. A recent study found that more than a third of
families surveyed went into debt to cover phone and visitation costs.

The Martha Wright-Reed Just and Reasonable Communications Act would enable the
Federal Communications Commission to revive the work it has already completed to
reduce the cost of telephone communication home from prisons and jails and ensure the
new law will be effective regardless of which technology is used to provide
communications services. It will also ensure that incarcerated people with disabilities
receive protection.

We are hopeful that the Martha Wright-Reed Just and Reasonable Communications Act
will rein in the exploitation of families of incarcerated people throughout the country.
This bill recognizes and respects the humanity of incarcerated people by offering them
the same consumer protections afforded to the rest of the nation’s consumers.

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3 Seventy-four percent of local jails across the country that adopt video visitation eliminate in-person visits. See:
Screening Out Family Time: The for-profit video visitation industry in prisons and jails by Bernadette Rabuy and Peter

4 Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families by Saneta deVuono-powell, Chris Schweidler, Alicia Walters,
and Azadeh Zohrahi (Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Forward Together, and Research Action Design)
On behalf of the millions of children of incarcerated parents, we thank you for your leadership and look forward to working with you to ensure passage of the Martha Wright-Reed Just and Reasonable Communications Act.

Sincerely,

A New PATH (Parents for Addiction Treatment & Healing)
A New Way of Life Re-Entry Project
Access Humboldt
American Psychological Association
California Families Against Solitary Confinement
California National Organization for Women
Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB)
Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice
Church of Scientology National Affairs Office
Community Works
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces
CURE (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants)
Robin Davenport
Professor Sharon Dolovich, UCLA School of Law, Director, UCLA Prison Law and Policy Program
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights
End Solitary Santa Cruz County
Face To Face Knox
FAIR CHANCE PROJECT
First Friends of NJ & NY
FedCURE
Whitney Foskey
Franciscan Action Network
Free Press Action
Freedom for Immigrants (formerly CIVIC)
Friends of Guest House
Illinois Campaign for Prison Phone Justice
Interfaith Action for Human Rights
International CURE
Islamic Society of North America
Jamila Hammami, MSW
Joanne Hessmiller, Ph.D., LCSW
The Jordan Center
Justice Strategies
Kristie E. Puckett, MA
The Ladies of Hope Ministries (The LOHM)
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Legal Services for Prisoners With Children
Life for Pot
LPS/LIFE Progressive Services Group Inc
Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (MPAC)
Middle Ground Prison Reform (Arizona)
Michigan Citizens for Justice
David Miles
NAACP
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Association of Social Workers
National Consumer Law Center, on behalf of its low-income clients
The National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls
National Hispanic Media Coalition
New Jersey Advocates for Immigrant Detainees
No Exceptions Prison Collective
Opportunities, Alternatives and Resources of Tompkins County, NY
Oregon CURE
OVEC-Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition
Place4Grace
Prison Policy Initiative
Public Knowledge
Queer Detainee Empowerment Project
Riverside All of Us or None
Topeka K. Sam
Tamara Sanford
Penny Schoner
Judy Schuler
Gail Smith
Social Workers Against Solitary Confinement
Starting Over, Inc
StoptheDrugWar.org
Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center
UCLA Prison Law and Policy Program
Union for Reform Judaism
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
United Church of Christ, OC Inc.
Voice of the Experienced
Volunteers for Hancock Jail (ME) Residents (VHJR)
Working Narratives
Worth Rises