

# Duckworth, Portman, Colleagues Urge FCC to Provide Relief to Families of Incarcerated Individuals During COVID-19

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WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Senators Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and Rob Portman (R-OH), along with 17 colleagues, wrote a bipartisan letter urging the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to encourage telecommunications providers serving law enforcement facilities to provide relief to families of incarcerated individuals by allowing free phone calls and video visitations during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. As in-person visits at federal and non-federal correctional and detention facilities have been suspended to combat the spread of infection, the Senators highlighted the importance of ensuring that families of inmates have affordable and reliable ways to communicate with their loved ones. While the Federal Bureau of Prisons is offering free communication services, most State, County and Local law enforcement facilities are unable to waive fees and charges in a timely manner without agreement from their service providers.

In part, the Senators wrote: “The FCC must do more to bring needed relief to incarcerated individuals and their families, many of whom are already facing increased economic hardship due to the coronavirus pandemic and forced to choose between communicating with a loved one and paying their bills.”

They continued to say, “The FCC is uniquely positioned to seek commitments from these providers in the same spirit as the *Keep Americans Connected Pledge* to help address a public health issue for inmates and law enforcement personnel while preserving safety and security at law enforcement facilities and ensuring just and reasonable communications for inmates and their families.”

Along with Duckworth and Portman, the letter was signed by Senators Ed Markey (D-MA), Tom Udall (D-NM), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Tina Smith (D-MN), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Bob Casey (D-PA), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Angus King (I-ME), Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY).