

For Immediate Release

Contact: Chris Puyear
christopher.puyear@mt.gov
(C): 406-431-2499

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PSC Solicits Input on Inmate Calling Rates

HELENA, Mont. – Officials at the Montana Public Service Commission (PSC) believe some telecommunications customers could be paying too much for phone calls placed using the assistance of an operator.

The Commission is seeking input on the maximum allowable rates charged for in-state calls placed through an operator service provider (OSP).

The use of OSPs has declined in recent years due to the advancement of mobile technology and web-based search; however, operator assisted calls remain common in places where customers do not have ready access to a cell phone, including rural areas and state and local correctional facilities.

A bill passed earlier this year, HB 426, sponsored by Representative Jean Price (D-Great Falls), capped rates for in-state, inmate calling at 10 cents per minute, but the law only applies to calls placed from state prisons. Rates charged to inmates at city or county correctional facilities remain subject to rate caps set by the PSC.

The PSC is asking commentators to provide feedback on whether maximum allowable rates for in-state, inmate calling should mirror the rate caps provided in HB 426, as well as the method used to establish maximum rates for all other operator service provider calls.

The PSC's comes on the heels of a [decision](#) by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) not to pursue rate caps for in-state, inmate calling.

"The Commission agrees with the FCC's interpretation that intra-state call rates are a matter best left up to the states," said Chairman Brad Johnson (R-East Helena). "We're committed to re-examining these rates to ensure that some of Montana's most vulnerable citizens: families with loved ones serving time behind bars, are not paying too much for phone services."

The Commission last updated rates for operator service provider calls in September 2015 when it established a rate cap of \$1.16 per minute.

The Commission invites interested persons to submit written comments addressing the proposed amendment of ARM 38.5.3403 pertaining to Operator Service Providers **no later than July 3, 2017**, either by mail or hand delivery to the Commission at 1701 Prospect Avenue, Helena, MT, 59620, or by email to psc_utilitycomment@mt.gov. Comments can also be submitted using the PSC's web-based comment form at <http://psc.mt.gov> (go to "Comment on Proceedings").

To view the *Notice of Opportunity to Comment*, visit: <http://bit.ly/2rwcYYY>

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Made up of five elected commissioners, the PSC works to ensure that Montanans receive safe and reliable service from regulated public utilities while paying reasonable rates. Utilities regulated by the PSC generally include private investor-owned natural gas, electric, telephone, water, and sewer companies. In addition, the PSC regulates certain motor carriers, and oversees natural gas pipeline safety and intrastate railroad safety.