

Media Advisory

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

September 18, 2017

PSC to Hold Public Hearing on Inmate Calling Rates

What: Public hearing on inmate calling rates
When: Tuesday, September 19, 1:30 pm
Where: PSC Business Office, 1701 Prospect Avenue, Helena, MT 59601
Livestream: <http://psc.mt.gov/video.asp>

On Tuesday, The Montana Public Service Commission (PSC) will conduct a public hearing to receive comment on a proposed rulemaking to limit charges for phone calls between inmates and their families.

The meeting will take place on **Tuesday, September 19, 1:30 pm at the PSC Business Office, 1701 Prospect Avenue, Helena, MT 59601.**

Interested persons are invited to attend and share their experience with the phone services offered in Montana's county and local correctional facilities.

"There's no more difficult time for a family than when a loved one finds themselves behind bars," said Commissioner Tony O'Donnell, R-Billings. "The Commission wants to ensure that, when faced with this situation, families have access to quality callings services at rates that are just and reasonable."

Earlier this year, the PSC issued a notice requesting comment on the maximum allowable rate charged for calls between places in Montana and local correctional facilities in the state. Many of those comments expressed frustration with the price and quality of service of the companies that provide telephone services in detention facilities.

In response to these concerns, the Commission voted unanimously to initiate a rulemaking to establish maximum rates, or caps, for calls placed from county jails and local correctional facilities.

The proposed rulemaking mirrors per minute and ancillary service charge rate caps established by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for interstate inmate calling. According to

the PSC's notice, rates would be capped at \$.25 per minute for collect calls and \$.21 per minute for calls placed using a pre-paid phone card.

The Commission's decision would not affect calls to or from the state prison in Deer Lodge, which are by contract capped at \$0.14 per minute. Meanwhile, information obtained by the PSC suggests that there is a wide variance between calling rates at different detention facilities.

"Our goal is to establish a rate that is both equitable and consistent across the state," said Chairman Brad Johnson, R-East Helena.

The Commission will also accept written comments on the proposed rate caps until Sept. 22. Comments can be submitted either by mail or hand delivery to the Commission at 1701 Prospect Avenue, Helena, MT, 59620, or by email to psc_utilitycomment@mt.gov.

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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.