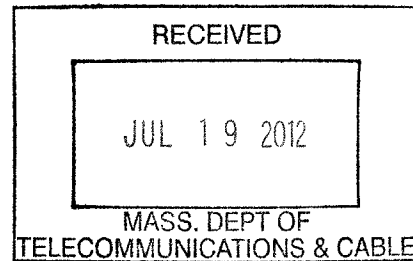


JUL 13 2012

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2 Administration Rd.  
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July 9, 2012

Prisoners' Legal Services  
Attn: Bonita Tenneriello, Esq.  
10 Winthrop Square, 3rd Floor  
Boston, MA 02110



Re: DTC Petition; Request for Comments

Dear Ms. Tenneriello:

This letter is written in response to the PLS petition pending before the Department of Telecommunications and Cable.

As I have been incarcerated since April 2008, and because I also have prior experience in the design and maintenance of Voice over IP (VoIP) business telephone systems, I thought I could offer a unique perspective on the inmate telephone services in Massachusetts. Please, if you read nothing else, consider the proposed solution I advance in section II(B) below.

I have used two service providers during my imprisonment: Evercom, while in the Essex County Correctional Facility, and Global Tel Link (GTL), while in the Department of Correction (DOC). I would like to address each of these companies separately:

#### I. Evercom

Of the two providers I have used, Evercom was the more obscene. Between April and September of 2008, the cost of an out-of-state call was approximately \$30.00 for 20 minutes. I am not from Massachusetts, so I painstakingly set up multiple local phone numbers through Verizon, which I then forwarded to the out-of-state numbers I needed to call. The cost for these calls was still over \$6.00 each, not including the forwarding fees.

The time one first spends in jail--those early months before trial or sentencing--are the most critical to a criminal defendant. Often he or she needs to call attorneys, possibly locate witnesses or conduct other defense-related business, and handle all manner of personal affairs. For example, in my case, I not only needed to be in near-daily contact with my lawyer (I assisted in the preparation of legal filings), I was desperately trying to maintain a relationship with my fiancée. My elderly parents were very worried and wanted to hear from their only child. And I needed to transact serious personal business, including the hand-off of my

computer services company to others, so that clients could be gracefully transferred to new support firms.

I estimate that I paid Evercom at least \$5,400 for phone calls during that six-month period in Essex County (5 calls/day at \$6.00 each for 6 months). Five calls per day for a prisoner may seem like a lot of phone usage, but that was only about an hour and a half per day. Again, this was also during pre-trial (not convicted) status.

I paid the thousands of dollars to Evercom because the alternative--abandoning all hope *and* effort--was unthinkable. At the time, I would have sacrificed a limb to make those calls. What is shameful is that Evercom took advantage of my helpless, vulnerable state; it preys on the weak. Even I, a convicted felon, would never stoop so low. If it were not for the numerous prison volunteers I have encountered, reminding me of the good in the world, I could have easily succumbed to the cynicism and bitterness I felt at having been ruthlessly raped by Evercom.

## II. Global Tel Link

After my conviction and sentencing, I was transferred to the DOC, where I have spent the past four years patronizing GTL (to my dismay).

### A. Technical considerations

Recently I was able to confirm that GTL uses VoIP to carry its calls (essentially, routing phone calls over the Internet), a technology that is often inferior to the traditional phone network from a quality standpoint. If configured properly, VoIP can provide decent phone service and huge cost savings. The typical termination cost of a VoIP phone call is \$0.01/minute or less, depending on quantity of minutes purchased, a figure easily verifiable via Google search.

However, it is evident to me, based on my professional experience with VoIP, that GTL multiplexes (squeezes) too many calls into insufficient bandwidth, most likely by using lower quality voice codecs that are designed to digitize the human voice using as few data bits as possible. I know the sound quality is poor both at the transmitting and receiving ends of the call; I often must repeat what I am saying and vice versa. This problem is particularly pronounced at MCI Concord.

### B. Rate considerations

GTL charges 72.5 cents (before taxes) for the initial minute of each call. There is no justification for making the cost of the first minute higher than any other minute, especially when the

call is prepaid; prepaid calls carry no risk of nonpayment.

In addition, as I am sure you are aware, sudden, mid-call disconnections are commonplace, requiring a redial and hence an additional 72.5 cents.

There is no complaint or refund procedure in place that I am aware of. However, in lieu of the overhead of establishing reliable customer service, I would propose a far simpler solution: reduce the cost of the first minute to equal that of subsequent minutes. Thus, any unwarranted disconnections would not cost the prisoner, and there would be far fewer reasons for complaint. This is how the phone system in all the federal prisons is set up.

Moreover, reducing the cost of the initial minute would allow short calls to be placed at a more reasonable rate--as it stands now, it makes sense to call less frequently for longer durations. Calling an attorney's office only to find out several times that she is out of the office becomes quite expensive. Similarly, the desire to call Mom--just to quickly check on how she is faring--must too often be squelched.

In sum, providing phone service to prisoners can be both profitable and fair. The scale currently tips much too far on the side of profit, to the point of unchecked greed. Where customers have no choice of provider, as in the matter at hand, normal self-regulating free market principles do not hold; government intervention is necessary.

Thank you so much for advocating on our behalf.

Sincerely,



Jason A. Copson