

Furious at the FCC, Arkansas jail cancels inmate phone calls rather than lower rates

If “the Federal Communications Commission reverses their adverse regulations,” Montgomery said, “the Baxter County Sheriff’s Office will revisit the feasibility of reimplementing the inmate phone system.”

One might expect this view to generate some sympathy in the MAGA-fied halls of FCC HQ. But the Commission’s two Republicans actually voted in *favor* of the rate control order last year. Current FCC Chair Brendan Carr even agreed that inmate phone calls in American prisons were often “excessive” and that the private operators behind these systems represented a “market failure.” He then voted for straight-up, old-school price caps.

In fact, Carr went on to offer a robust defense of inmate calling, saying: “[I often] heard from families who experienced firsthand the difficulties of maintaining contact with their incarcerated loved ones. I also heard from formerly incarcerated individuals who underscored the decline in mental and emotional health that can result from a lack of external communications. Beyond that, studies have repeatedly shown that increased communication between incarcerated people and their families, friends, and other outside resources helps reduce recidivism rates.”

So Montgomery may not get this decision reversed easily. (On the other hand, Carr did just launch a “Delete! Delete! Delete!” initiative focused on cutting regulations, so who knows.)

Baxter County claims that the FCC decision means that phone services are no longer “feasible.” In 2018, however, when Baxter County wanted to expand its jail and didn’t have the cash, officials found a way to make it feasible by asking voters to approve a 1-cent sales tax collected between April and September of that year. (You can even watch a time-lapse video of the jail expansion being built.) Feasibility, it turns out, is often in the eye of the beholder.

Montgomery did say that he would add some additional in-person visiting hours at the jail to compensate for the lack of phone calls, and last week his office posted the new schedule. But as positive as in-person contact can be, in a busy world it is still nice to have the option of a reasonably priced phone call—you know, the kind that’s “feasible” to offer at most other jails in the US.

<https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/03/rather-than-lower-rates-arkansas-jail-simply-cancels-all-inmate-phone-calls/>