



South Carolina Department of Corrections

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COLUMBIA, S.C. – A test to jam cell phone signals conducted in a South Carolina prison earlier this year proves the technology works without interfering with cell phones on the outside.

The results of the test, published today by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, say the new technology stopped cell phone signals inside an inmate housing dorm at Broad River Correctional Institution while allowing calls to be made one foot outside the unit.

“Director Bryan Stirling has led a nationwide effort in demonstrating the dangers of contraband cell phones in prisons and it has become clear that it is far past time to allow states to jam cell phone signals in prisons,” Gov. Henry McMaster said.

The Federal Communications Commission regulates the airwaves, and a decades-old law prohibits jamming the signals used by cell phones. The Cell Phone Jamming Reform Act, introduced in Congress earlier this year, would change that and allow prisons to jam the signals.

The test answers questions raised by some lawmakers and industry officials about whether the technology would affect areas near prisons.

“I saw first-hand that this technology works,” said Stirling, Director of the S.C. Department of Corrections. “I hope we can count on Congress to pass this legislation quickly so we can make our prisons safer for officers, inmates and society.”

Contraband cell phones have proven to be the most dangerous weapon in prisons today. Inmates have been prosecuted for using cell phones to order murders, incite violence, orchestrate escapes, demand money from innocent victims and run sophisticated criminal

enterprises from inside prison walls. As recently as July, an SCDC inmate was charged with orchestrating a murder through calls and texts on a contraband cell phone. Others have stalked victims on social media and been charged with running sophisticated sextortion and blackmail scams.

“People are physically incarcerated, but contraband cell phones allow them to be virtually out among us committing crimes,” Stirling said. “We see this over and over again, with inmates ordering murders, extorting money from family and strangers and continuing their criminal ways from behind bars.”

Since 2015, SCDC has confiscated more than 25,000 cell phones and accessories from inside its institutions. This technology would eliminate any cell signal from leaving institutions, rendering the phones useless.

The test was conducted in April at Broad River Correctional Institution by the Federal Bureau of Prisons in conjunction with the U.S. Attorney’s Office and SCDC. This is the first time this technology has been tested at a state corrections facility. The Bureau of Prisons has tested the technology twice in federal institutions.

“I would like to thank Assistant Attorney General Beth Williams for her leadership on this issue,” Stirling said. “Now we need Congress to act so we so we can stop these illegal cell phones from working in our prisons.”