



Legislative Testimony
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Written Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 972, An Act Concerning the Cost of Telecommunications Services in Correctional Facilities

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Ranking Members Kissel and Fishbein, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Kelly McConney Moore, and I am the interim senior policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 972, An Act Concerning the cost of Telecommunications Services in Correctional Facilities.

For people who are incarcerated, maintaining familial and community bonds is crucial to mental health, physical health, community health, and community safety. The ACLU-CT believes that those societal benefits should not be bought by the most vulnerable people in our communities. Yet, Connecticut has not just expected the loved ones of incarcerated people to bear the exorbitant cost of maintaining relationships, but also has profited off that separation. Senate Bill 972 seeks to correct this grave injustice.

Justice-impacted families are bled dry by the criminal legal system. Experts estimate that families of incarcerated people pay nearly \$3 billion every single year on the hidden costs of incarceration.¹ There are commissary costs, costs associated with visitation, legal costs, sometimes even the costs of housing incarcerated loved ones, and, of course, costs for telecommunications. A short prison phone call in Connecticut costs an outrageous amount of money – \$3.45 for 15 minutes.² This rate makes

¹ Nicole Lewis & Beatrix Lockwood, “The hidden cost of incarceration.” The Marshall Project, Dec. 17, 2019, available at <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2019/12/17/the-hidden-cost-of-incarceration>.

² Lisa Backus, “Lawmaker continues push to reduce cost of phone calls from prison.” CT News Junkie, Feb. 9, 2021, available at <https://ctnewsjunkie.com/2021/02/09/lawmaker-continues-push-to-reduce-cost-of-phone-calls-from-prison/>.

Connecticut dead-last in the entire country for affordability of prison phone calls.³ Worst of all, Connecticut is profiting – to the tune of \$7.7 million per year – from these phone calls.⁴

The people who bear these costs are often the ones least likely able to do so. People from poorer backgrounds are more likely to be imprisoned.⁵ More than 50% of all incarcerated people in Connecticut are a caregiver for child⁶ – leaving more than 17,000 children in our state with a caregiver behind bars.⁷ If the children of incarcerated caregivers do not come up with the costs for phone calls, these children are likely to have extremely limited contact with their caregiver. These children are bearing the costs of prison phone calls. And of course, because Black and Latinx people in Connecticut are disproportionately likely to be incarcerated, due to systemic racism,⁸ families of color bear a disproportionate burden when it comes to prison phone calls. Of people paying to stay in touch with family members, 87% are women.⁹ The costs of calls and visitation is the top barrier for families try to stay in touch during incarceration.¹⁰

Even though these vulnerable families and communities are footing the bill and then some, our entire state reaps the benefits of these social connections. Good communication throughout incarceration makes people less likely to recidivate after

³ “Connecticut lawmakers push to end predatory prison phone rates.” The Crime Report, Feb. 22, 2021, available at <https://thecrimereport.org/2021/02/22/connecticut-lawmakers-push-to-end-predatory-prison-phone-rates/#:~:text=Connecticut%20is%20now%20the%20most,%240.21%2D%240.325%20per%20minute>.

⁴ Lisa Backus, “Lawmaker continues push to reduce cost of phone calls from prison.” CT News Junkie, Feb. 9, 2021, available at <https://ctnewsjunkie.com/2021/02/09/lawmaker-continues-push-to-reduce-cost-of-phone-calls-from-prison/>.

⁵ Adam Looney & Nicholas Turner, “Work and opportunity before and after incarceration.” Brookings Institution, Mar. 14, 2018, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/research/work-and-opportunity-before-and-after-incarceration/>.

⁶ “Fact Sheet,” CT Children with Incarcerated Parents Initiative, 2020, available at <http://ctcip.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2020-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

⁷ As of April 2016. Erica Dean “Opinion: Lessen impact of having parents behind bars.” Hartford Courant, Jun. 3, 2016, available at <https://www.courant.com/opinion/letters/hc-ugc-article-why-are-we-still-not-talking-about-the-kids-2016-06-02-story.html>.

⁸ See, e.g., Jordan Fenster, “Racial disparities persist in CT prisons, even as the population dropped.” CT Post, Oct. 16, 2020, available at <https://www.ctinsider.com/local/ctpost/article/Racial-disparities-persist-in-CT-prisons-even-as-15651213.php>.

⁹ Saneta DeVuono-Powell, Chris Schweidler, Alicia Walters, & Azadeh Zohrabi, “Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families”. Ella Baker Center 2015, available at <http://whopaysreport.org/who-pays-full-report/>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

reentering their communities.¹¹ Those improved outcomes are the result of a direct transfer of money from the families of incarcerated people to the state of Connecticut and a private telecom company¹² – when it really should be Connecticut itself paying the costs as an investment in the health of its communities.

The ACLU-CT strongly supports Senate Bill 972 and the push to make prison phone calls free to the families who depend on them, from the communities who benefit from them. We urge this Committee to support this bill.

¹¹ See Alex Friedmann, “Lowering recidivism through family communication.” Prison Legal News, Apr. 15, 2014, available at <https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/2014/apr/15/lowering-recidivism-through-family-communication/>.

¹² Lisa Backus, “Lawmaker continues push to reduce cost of phone calls from prison.” CT News Junkie, Feb. 9, 2021, available at <https://ctnewsjunkie.com/2021/02/09/lawmaker-continues-push-to-reduce-cost-of-phone-calls-from-prison/>.