

Judiciary Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-972

AN ACT CONCERNING THE COST OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES

Title: IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES.

Vote Date: 3/29/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/22/2021

File No.: 453

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Judiciary Committee

Rep. Josh Elliott, 88th Dist.,
Rep. Travis Simms, 140th Dist.,
Sen. Martin M. Looney, 11th Dist.,
Rep. Joshua M. Hall, 7th Dist.,
Sen. Will Haskell, 26th Dist.,
Rep. Edwin Vargas, 6th Dist.,
Sen. Marilyn V. Moore, 22nd Dist.,
Rep. David Michel, 146th Dist.,
Rep. Michael A. Winkler, 56th Dist.,
Rep. Anne M. Hughes, 135th Dist.,
Rep. Jillian Gilchrest, 18th Dist.,
Rep. Robyn A. Porter, 94th Dist.,
Rep. Jason Rojas, 9th Dist.,

Rep. Julio A. Concepcion, 4th Dist.,
Sen. Julie Kushner, 24th Dist.,
Rep. Frank Smith, 118th Dist.,
Rep. Quentin W. Phipps, 100th Dist.,
Rep. Christine Palm, 36th Dist.,
Rep. John "Jack" F. Hennessy, 127th Dist.,
Rep. Anthony L. Nolan, 39th Dist.,
Sen. Saud Anwar, 3rd Dist.,
Rep. Steven J. Stafstrom, 129th Dist.,
Rep. Brandon L. McGee, 5th Dist.,
Sen. Patricia Billie Miller, 27th Dist.,
Rep. Aimee Berger-Girvalo, 111th Dist.,

REASONS FOR BILL:

This legislation would remove the cost of telecommunication from incarcerated individuals and their families. As it stands, Connecticut has the highest cost for incarcerated individuals to make calls to their families in the United States, and this legislation would make Connecticut the first state to remove the cost from inmates and their families. Studies have shown a positive correlation between increased communication outside of a correctional facility and lower reincarceration rates. Removing the cost of telecommunication would almost certainly increase the amount of contact between incarcerated individuals and their families.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

The Connecticut Judicial Branch supports the intent of this legislation but notes that the lost revenue from telecommunications charges will make it difficult to retain 28 probation officers, and notes that an additional \$2.2 million on top of the extra amount that the Governor's Budget allocates to this purpose are needed in order to maintain these officers if this legislation was passed.

Connecticut Department of Corrections, Commissioner, Angel Quiros supports this legislation based on the relatively low revenue this generates the state in comparison to the benefit this would add. Notes that this legislation would increase the frequency of phone calls and thus may require the department to install extra phones at correctional facilities.

Office of Chief Public Defender, Deputy Assistant Public Defender Benedict R. Daigle testifies in support of this legislation based on research that suggests that increased communication with family members leads to more success in rehabilitation and inmates return to their community. They also note how important it is for the children of incarcerated individuals to be able to consistently communicate with their parent, and how telecommunications and in-person visits compare similarly.

State of Connecticut Office of the Child Advocate, Acting Child Advocate, Sarah Healy Eagan: supports this legislation based on research that shows that younger incarcerated individuals benefit especially positively to consistent contact with family members and other adults, and that these visits reflect in improved behavior and school performance.

State of Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities: supports this legislation and expresses particular interest in this matter due to the "disproportionate" number of people of color who are incarcerated, and notes that because of this, that group is affected in a more significant way by the "prohibitive" cost of calling, which consequentially may make reentry more difficult for incarcerated individuals who cannot cover the cost of the calls.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Jerome N. Frank Legal Services Organization, The Criminal Justice Advocacy Clinic, Allison Durkin, Destiny Lopez, and Eleanor Roberts testify in strong support of this legislation, primarily citing the factor of allowing incarcerated individuals to maintain contact with their family and children, which becomes a factor when these individuals are released from incarceration and are seeking to reunite with their children. How often they communicate is taken into consideration and so this group advocates for removing that cost barrier.

Yale Young Democrats, New Haven, Josephine Cureton and Josh Guo express concern with there being profit from telecommunications for incarcerated individuals and support [s] cost-free communication for incarcerated individuals to maintain a connection with family and friends.

Connecticut Veterans Legal Center, Staff Attorney, Chelsea Donaldson Esq. supports this legislation because it prevents incarcerated individuals from feeling socially isolated due to cost. They note that Connecticut has the highest cost associated with phone calls for

incarcerated individuals and asks that Connecticut be the first state in the U.S. to eliminate this cost.

Stop Solitary, Steering Committee Member and Lead Organizer, Barbara Fair supports language that would remove cost associated telecommunications for incarcerated individuals.

Ct Legal Rights Project, Executive Director, Kathy Flaherty supports this legislation and testifies on how important it is for incarcerated individuals to maintain connection with loved ones and believes that this legislation addresses that.

Southern Connecticut State University Democrats, President, Justin Gendron supports this legislation and does not support limiting the freedom of speech of incarcerated individuals with a fiscal cost.

CT National Organization for Women, West Haven, Member, Maggie Goodwin supports this legislation and believes that communication with the outside world should be a part of the rehabilitation process for incarcerated people, especially so that once they are released from incarceration, they can more easily reintegrate with society.

College Democrats of CT, Political Director, Iman Jaroudi supports the freedom of speech of incarcerated individuals and believes that a financial barrier to telecommunication violates that freedom.

Prison Policy Initiative, Policy Analyst, Alexi Jones testifies based on research that increased communication with family leads to a lower reincarceration rate and that by restricting that contact with a cost, the state is likely increasing their costs because of the higher re-offense rate.

Connecticut Children with Incarcerated Parents Initiative, Project Manager, Aileen Keays supports this legislation and notes the positive impact of consistent communication they have seen on the children of incarcerated parents. They also note the positive impact communication has on the incarcerated individual for when they re-enter into a community after their release.

Verizon, Director of Government Affairs in New York and Connecticut, David Lamendola supports this legislation on the basis that communication with family and friends helps incarcerated individuals reconnect with the world when they are released from incarceration. Believes that the "exorbitant" costs create a barrier to this.

Senate President Pro Tempore, Sen. Martin Looney 11th Dist. supports this legislation both as a matter of fairness and because of studies that have shown the positive impact increased contact has had in terms of re-entering society after incarceration. Senator Looney does not believe that this should be an area of profit, and therefore supports removing the cost to inmates.

ACLU Connecticut, Interim Senior Policy Counsel, Kelly McConney Moore cites data that shows the positive impact of increased communication between incarcerated individuals and their families and testifies that these individuals and their families should not bear the costs of this.

Southern New England Conference Church of Christ, Legislative Advocate, Michele Mudrick supports this legislation and believes that incarcerated individuals should have the right to communicate with their loved ones without financial burden.

Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence, Director of Policy and Public Relations, Lucy Nolan supports this legislation and testifies that the majority of women who are incarcerated have been victims of sexual assault, and that those who have been victims previously are likely to be victims again in prison. Removing the financial barrier to outside communication is an important step to supporting these survivors.

NAMI Shoreline, Board Member, Denise Paley testifies in support and gives account of her son's experience being incarcerated and believes that the cost burden should be removed for incarcerated individuals to communicate with loved ones.

CT Justice Alliance, Policy Director, Iliana Pujols supports this legislation and its elimination of the cost of telecommunications for incarcerated individuals as a step towards encouraging policies toward family engagement and restorative practices for these individuals.

Wesleyan Democrats, Policy Director, Reed Schwartz supports the legislation and believes that a cost barrier to incarcerated individuals making phone calls restricts their freedom of speech.

CT Voices for Children, Chief of Staff, Sana Shah supports this legislation and its efforts to remove the cost burden of communication for incarcerated individuals and their families. Cites studies that show that children with an incarcerated parent perform better in school and at home when they can consistently communicate with that parent.

National Association of Social Workers, Connecticut Chapter, Amber Kelly, PhD, MSW, LCSW supports this legislation and cites evidence that suggests that increased communication to people outside of a correctional facility is correlated with lower rates of reincarceration as well as more positive behavior while still incarcerated.

Center for Children's Advocacy, Staff Attorney, Adam Yagaloff Esq. supports this legislation and how it positively impacts reentry to society from incarcerated individuals by maintaining a connection with people outside of a correctional facility. They argue that the cost that is currently attached to telecommunication is a barrier to this connection.

The following individuals gave similar testimony that expressed support for cost-free telecommunications because it allowed incarcerated individuals to communicate with their loved ones and not suffer from the ill effects of social isolation due to any cost barriers. Most noted that the Connecticut had the highest telecommunication cost of any state for incarcerated persons. Many also gave an account of their experiences with the Covid-19 pandemic and the social isolation the pandemic caused and related the experience to what incarcerated individuals experience.

*CT Resident, Sydney Bryant
Anonymous CT Resident
CT Resident, Taylor Biniarz*

*CT Resident, Kennedy Bennett
Fairfield, CT Resident, Emma Bell Bass-
Lawrence*

*CT Resident, David Donnan
CT Resident, Alana Ervin
University of Connecticut, Master's in
Social Work Candidate, Molly Franco
Middletown CT, Resident, Alma Hutter
New Haven CT, Resident and Student,
Brett Jennings
Middletown CT, Resident, Chloe Johnson
CT Resident, Sophie Kane
New Haven CT, Resident and Student,
Shannon Leslie
Middletown CT, Resident, Serena
Levingston
CT Resident, Amelie Lo
CT Resident, Raymond Lucarelli
New Haven CT, Resident and Student,
Marcus McKee
New Haven CT, Resident, Sarah McKinnis
CT Resident, Jennifer Melo
CT Resident, Isabella Morales*

*New Haven CT, Resident and Student,
Vanessa Nunez
CT Resident, Alvara Perpuly
CT Resident, Evan Roberts
Fairfield CT, Resident, Eli Roche
Trumbull CT, Resident, Nanee Sajeev
New Britain CT, Resident, Mary L. Sanders
Middletown CT, Resident and Student,
Lisa Stein
New Haven CT, Resident and Student,
Katie Taylor
New Haven CT, Resident and Student,
Grace Whittington
Julia Wilcox, The Alliance
Middletown CT, Resident, Simon Worth*

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF
OPPOSITION:**

None stated.

Reported by: Justin Kaiser

Date: 4/7/2021