

# Prison Phone Fact Sheet

For most people access to phone calls is considered a basic right, but for the families of the 2.4 million people incarcerated in jails and correctional facilities across the country - a phone call is an expensive luxury. With those in prison and detention centers an average of 100-150 miles from home, phone calls have increasingly become the most common way those behind bars and their families stay connected. Studies have shown that communication between families and their incarcerated loved ones is tied to reducing recidivism.

## The Problem

### State of Prisons in the U.S.

- The total incarcerated population in the U.S. is a staggering 2.4 million – a 500% increase over the past 30 years.
- In 2012 one in 108 adults were in prison or jail and 1 in 28 American children has a parent behind bars.

### High Phone Rates, Record Profits :

- To speak with a loved one in prison costs up to 24 times more than a normal call.
- A typical interstate collect call from a prison can run 90 cents per minute or more. Compare that to the five cents or less AT&T charges for the same sort of call using a prepaid phone card.
- Families face rates of \$10-17 for a 15-minute collect call or \$250 per month for a weekly one-hour call.
- Securus, which provides phone services to 2,600 prisons and jails in 47 states, made \$114.6 million in profit in 2014 - a 51% gross profit margin representing the biggest jump in years.

### Exorbitant Fees:

- Up to 60% of the price of prison phone calls is not for the cost of the service but for “commissions” to prison agencies - 85% of state systems collect these kickbacks.
- In 2014, correctional facilities received over \$460 million in commission payments from prison telephone companies.

### Devastating Impact on Families

- Predatory phone rates discourage regular telephone contact with stable family members and others in the community driving crisis levels of recidivism in the U.S.
- Nearly 2 in 3 families (65%) with an incarcerated member were unable to meet their family's basic needs.
- The high cost of maintaining contact with incarcerated family members led more than 1 in 3 families (34%) into debt to pay for phone calls and visits alone.

“Many families of inmates still face exorbitant rates for in-state calls, not to mention punitive and irrational fees—all of which make the simple act of staying in touch unaffordable.”

**Press release from the  
Federal Communications Commission**

## Solutions:

### Provide the most affordable rates to families:

- Every cent represents about 15 million in losses to the families of those incarcerated nationwide.
- 5-7 cents a minute is possible in communities where commissions are eliminated.
- 11 states across the country already have rates less than 10 cents a minute - including some as low as 3.2 cents a minute..

### Provide the most affordable rates to families:

- If the FCC merely caps rates, costs will not decrease as companies tack on fees. A typical interstate collect call from a prison also has a \$3.95 "connection fee."
- Where kickbacks have been banned, prices dropped by 30-80 percent.

### Federal reform for ALL calls:

- Last year, federal reforms went into effect to lower the cost of long distance out of state phone calls to 21 to 25 cents per minute, depending on method of payment. This reduced interstate long-distance inmate calling rates by nearly 40%, this rate is significantly higher than the cost to provide the call, and all phone calls from prisons, jails and detention facilities remain unaffordable.
- Although some states have made reforms in recent years – in no small part due to lawsuits from prisoners and social justice advocates – many of these practices are still in place. As long as there is a practice of commissions benefiting local and state budgets, it will be difficult to produce state reform.

### 5 Lowest Prison phone rates per State

State	Rate for 15 min. call	% of Kickback
West Virginia	\$0.48	0.1%
New Jersey	\$0.66	No Kickback
New Mexico	\$0.66	No Kickback
New Hampshire	\$0.68	*
Rhode Island	\$0.70	No Kickback