

# #PHONEJUSTICE

In Prison, Jail, & Detention

## FACT SHEET

For more than a decade, families have been calling for relief from the high price of staying connected to their loved ones behind bars. The cost of a simple call has been as high as \$30 for a 15-minute call, causing families to make choices between other needs—like food and power—and regular contact. Meanwhile, the phone providers have seen windfall profits, and correctional facilities have received millions annually in kickbacks from the phone companies.

“My elderly dad is incarcerated. Our family has trouble scraping together enough money to enable phone calls and other needs. We’re all struggling to survive. It doesn’t help that the phone charges have at times verged on obscene and that extra charges are often tacked on.”  
-Daughter,  
San Antonio, TX

**2.4**  
million

### People Incarcerated in the U.S.

The total incarcerated population in the United States is 2.4 million—a 500 % increase compared to 30 years ago. One in 28 American children had a parent behind bars in 2012.

**250**  
dollars



### Monthly Cost to Stay Connected

A call from prison or jail can run up to \$1 a minute, compared to 5 cents a minute for a call on the outside. Families report paying around \$250 a month for regular connection with their loved ones inside. Hidden fees, such as a typical \$3.95 connection fee or \$10 payment fee, can double the cost of a call.

**\$1.2**  
billion

### Record Annual Industry Profits

The prison phone system is dominated by two companies that reportedly make up about 80 % of the prison phone business, which drives about \$1.2 billion per year in revenues. Securus, which provides phone services to 2,600 facilities in 47 states, made \$114.6 million in profits in 2014, a 51 % gross profit margin that was the biggest jump in years. Global Tel-Link, which controls 50% of the market for correctional institutions, was sold for \$1 billion in 2011.

**\$460**  
million

### Kickbacks from Prison Phone Companies

Up to 93.9 % of the price of prison phone calls is not for the cost of the service but for kickbacks of vendor profits to correctional facilities. 85 % of state systems collect these “commissions”. In 2013, correctional facilities received more than \$460 million in commission payments from prison telephone companies.

**1 in 3**  
families

### Can’t Pay the Cost to Stay Connected

According to a 2015 report, “Who Pays?”, one in three families go into debt because of the high cost of maintaining contact with incarcerated loved ones. Nearly two in three families with an incarcerated family member were unable to meet their family’s basic needs. The crisis of recidivism in the United States is exacerbated by predatory phone rates, which discourage regular contact between those behind bars and their support systems.