

# 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 in 1 in 28 American children had a parent behind bars.

### High Phone Rates, Record Profits

- A call from prison can run 90 cents per minute or more, compared to 5 cents a minute for a call on the outside.
- Families report paying around \$250 a month to stay regularly connected to their loved ones inside.
- 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.

### Kickbacks

- Up to 60% of the price of phone calls is not for the cost of the service but for the “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

- The crisis level of recidivism in the U.S. is being driven by predatory phone rates, which discourage regular contact between those who are incarcerated and their family and community.
- Nearly 2 in 3 families with an incarcerated family 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 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

- 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.
- The FCC should set the lowest phone rates as possible because every cent counts. Every penny of reduction in the rate cap represents millions of dollars in savings for families of the incarcerated nationwide.

### Ban kickbacks and ancillary fees

- 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. Although, 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	N/A
Rhode Island	\$0.70	No Kickback