



March 2021

Connecticut Legislative Office Building
300 Capital Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Connecticut state legislators,

For years, Connecticut families have paid unconscionable rates to stay connected with incarcerated loved ones. But in the last year, amid a global health crisis and the ensuing economic fallout, Connecticut earned the dubious distinction of ranking last in the country in the affordability of prison phone calls. Despite years of pleas for help, Connecticut families continue to pay as much as \$5 every time a child wants to hear their parent's voice for just 15 minutes.¹ Connecticut families need our leaders to take a stand – it is long past due.

We, the undersigned coalition of directly impacted and allied groups and organizations, urge the Connecticut legislature to pass Senate Bill 972 to stop charging families for prison communication.

Every year, Connecticut families spend over \$12 million to talk to incarcerated loved ones, lining the pockets of the State and its private telecom provider Securus. Worse yet, the State is actively implementing another revenue-sharing contract with its prison telecom provider for tablets that carry heavy usage costs for services like electronic messaging. Unsurprisingly, prior to the pandemic, nearly one in three went into debt trying to stay connected, and women – largely Black and Brown women – carried 87 percent of the burden.²

COVID-19 has shined another light on this travesty. As death rates still rise daily and families face catastrophic job loss, these statistics are undeniably worse today. It is now even more urgent that our leaders address the egregious cost of prison phone calls because families should not have to resort to skipping meals or utility bills so a child can hear the soothing sound of their parent's voice, especially at a time like this. It is a moral failure that we must make right.

Moreover, research has shown over and over again that when incarcerated people stay connected to their support networks, they do better both while they are behind bars and when they reenter the community. And the reverse is true. Children, for instance, do better at home and at school when they are able to maintain relationships with their parents in prison.

¹ Securus Rate Quote, available at <https://securustech.online>.

² Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families, Ella Baker Center, Forward Together, Research Action Design (2015), available at <https://ellabakercenter.org/who-pays-the-true-cost-of-incarceration-on-families>.

As this new session begins, we ask that you consider the most marginalized among us: families – disproportionately Black and Brown – struggling through unemployment, childcare, and mounting bills who, on top of all that, are also worrying about loved ones behind bars. Their incarcerated loved ones are at the highest risk of contracting COVID-19 and cannot hear or share simple comforting words without threatening the family's financial stability.

We ask that you please act now to protect Connecticut families by removing the financial burden of connecting with incarcerated loved ones now and forever. Connecticut has been at the bottom for too long and must seek amends by leading the country in progressive policy instead. No family should have to forego checking on the safety of a loved one because they cannot afford to, certainly not during a pandemic. The family unit should be cherished, promoted, and protected, not exploited and broken. Families with loved ones behind bars are no exception. They matter too.

Sincerely,

Advocacy in Action Coalition
Collaborative Center for Justice
Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence
Connecticut Bail Fund
Connecticut Prison Book Connection
Connecticut Office of the Child Advocate
Connecticut Voices for Children
Connecticut Working Families Party
CT Children with Incarcerated Parents Initiative
CT Juvenile Justice Alliance
CT Shoreline Indivisible
Ella's Fund PAC
First Congregational Church, Guilford
Greater Hartford Legal Aid
Hartford Deportation Defense
Mourning Our Losses
National Association of Social Workers Connecticut Chapter
National Consumer Law Center
New Haven Women's Resettlement Working Group
Progressive Action Network for the 34th State Senate District (PAN34)
Progressive Prison Ministries
Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ
Stop Solitary CT
Voice of Women of Color
Worth Rises
Yale College Democrats