JHA Special Report
Communication Issues Update
June 2019

The John Howard Association of Illinois (JHA) is the State’s only prison watchdog; we are a nonprofit, nonpartisan, independent organization that monitors correctional facilities, policies and practices, and advances reforms needed to achieve a fair, humane and effective criminal justice system. JHA visits correctional facilities, receives and responds to privileged mail from people who are incarcerated, and maintains open lines of communication regarding custodial conditions with other interested parties, such as loved ones, people who work in corrections, legislators, and other concerned citizens.

**Importance of Communication with Family and the Outside World**

* I feel this institution is made to make inmates lose all hope, time, lose personal outside connections. - JHA 2019 Survey Comment

Communication with those outside of prison is an issue of primary importance to incarcerated individuals, as is communication with them for their loved ones on the outside. People rely on these communications to be assured that the people they care about are safe in prison and to maintain social bonds so that individuals’ return to society can be smoother.

In JHA’s year-end 2016 report, we cautioned the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) regarding concerns about inadequate phone access becoming an increasing issue in the prisons, particularly as legislated rate reductions were being enacted in recognition of the importance of incarcerated people retaining outside connections. This issue, coupled with the protracted, long-promised rollout of vendor GTL’s technology, which importantly enables e-messaging and video visitation communication, was flagged as a major concern, among many other serious issues within IDOC, requiring more proactive planning.

This briefing, as a stand-alone report, is intended to bring renewed and increased attention to the problems faced by people within IDOC with respect to communications. As other jurisdictions consider legislative fixes for jail and prison phone rates and communication issues, we recommend examining planning failures and frustrations that persist within Illinois prisons. At the same time, we recognize and celebrate that some progress has been made, in that Illinois now has one of the lowest custodial calling rates in the nation and increased accessibility. However, while cost is a critical factor, it is just one of multiple barriers that can impede prisoners’ access to communication.
Beginning in 2016, JHA implemented surveys to capture greater input from incarcerated people on our prison visits. In 2018, nearly 60% of the over 9,500 incarcerated respondents to JHA’s surveys reported they did not have enough phone access. Further, many chose to comment indicating that this was one of the issues that was most problematic. This trend continued through the first half of 2019, with again about 60% of nearly 4,000 respondents reporting issues.

In 2016, when phone rates were beginning to drop, but were still significantly higher than they are today, staff and prisoners were already reporting to JHA that phone access was a major source of conflict between people at times leading to physical fights and other issues. JHA recommended increasing phone capacity and access by increasing time out of cell for prisoners, which is also recommended to alleviate health and welfare concerns arising from IDOC’s overreliance on restrictive housing. By 2016, the writing was on the wall that rates could be expected to continue to drop and that IDOC should prepare. Three and a half years later, although all facilities by mid-2019 had implemented some capacity for vendor GTL’s e-messaging and video visitation, IDOC continued to pilot GTL’s wireless tablet capacity at only two facilities, Decatur and Kewanee, both facilities where people report higher satisfaction with communication issues.

Installation, Implementation, and Repair Delays

Numerous delays have stalled the implementation of the GTL technology, including the difficulty of wiring old prison facilities. IDOC reports as of 2019 that all facilities are being wired to enable offering tablet technology to prisoners. However, the functionality and services that will be available to prisoners through tablets remains unclear. Meanwhile, the frustration in facilities with limited availability and capacity to provide outside communications remains high. Issues with increased demand for phone access have intensified, as phone rates dropped to less than a penny a minute at the beginning of Fiscal Year 2019, through the renegotiated contract with phone vendor Securus. While some diligent facility administrators have been scrambling to increase phone and
video visitation capacity and resolve issues, increased demand throughout the State means that there is competition amongst the facilities to get both vendors GTL and Securus representatives onsite for installations or repairs. Administrators report having to repeatedly request repairs and significant delays for maintenance. Incarcerated people and families echo these concerns regarding long waits for repairs and inadequate communication capacity.

**Lack of Communication Access Due to Limited Dayroom or Recreation Time**

Simultaneously, as we have frequently reported, people at many facilities in IDOC have inadequate out-of-cell opportunities. Many people housed in IDOC meet federal and international definitions for restrictive housing, commonly considered solitary confinement, of being confined to cells for 22 hours or more a day while they are held in IDOC custody. This takes place in reception and classification centers, some medium-security facilities, maximum-security facilities, segregation units, and with prisoners assigned to some special statuses, such as a “room restriction” or an investigative status while an incident of misconduct is being investigated. At some facilities people are forced to choose between beneficial activities when they are let out of their cells. For example, they must choose between taking a shower, going outside for fresh air and exercise, or waiting for a phone. Also, for those fortunate enough to have a school or work assignment, these activities may be scheduled so they miss a dayroom or other opportunity to use phones on yard or in the gym. Sometimes the limited times for access to phones do not coincide with their families’ schedules and no accommodations will be made. All security settings, even in minimums, where prisoners have more access to dayroom in comparison to other security levels, or maximums, where phones are passed between cells, have had phone issues due to scarcity and demand now that IDOC calls are about a penny a minute.

**IDOC’s Attempts to Alleviate Issues**

Unfortunately, at some facilities, to increase ratios of phones to inmates and lessen competition for phone access that reportedly can lead to increased physical fights, some administrators have further limited the number of people allowed out-of-cell at a given time. This at times results in less out-of-cell opportunities overall, e.g. staff allow a quarter of the people on a housing unit wing out-of-cell access at a time, instead of half, so that 25 instead of 50 men are vying to use 6 phones over a dayroom period of an hour and a half. Given that phone calls can be 30 minutes long, however, this still can result in not everyone who wants to use the phone having a chance (e.g. a maximum of 18 of 25 people making one call each). Further, increasingly, people are reporting that certain people, or “gangs,” on a unit will control the phone access, passing the phone only to their friends, or requiring payment or favors from others for use, or even denying access to some based on their prejudices.

To try to prevent this issue of some people inappropriately controlling access to phones to the detriment of others, IDOC administrators have implemented various changes. One change is that now after someone has placed one call on their Personal Identification Number (PIN) there is a block so that they cannot call out again with that PIN for 30 minutes. JHA has received various complaints about this, e.g. if somehow a call is picked up and disconnected in a short period the person is blocked from calling back or calling someone else; two people can still monopolize a phone by just passing it back and forth between them; or, even if no one else wants to use the
phone, a person still cannot call out a second time. We have also heard that some people will choose to miss meals or other desirable out-of-cell opportunities if this means they can get a chance to contact their families or use the phone with some degree of privacy. Another measure that recently has been implemented in some facilities is staggering out-of-cell time by allowing some people out earlier than others for dayroom so that they have more of a chance to access the phones, e.g. 6-8 people will get to go to dayroom 5-10 minutes before the rest so people do not have to race for the phones. Some people report that this method means that they now at least have some opportunities to use the phone, e.g. once or twice a week, although some people still report problems with others controlling phone access.

**Changes to Call Lists and Ability for Inmates to Pay for Calls**

To add yet another issue, beginning in 2019, inmates can now independently add up to 20 phone numbers to their phone lists as they call the numbers and the calls are accepted, without first obtaining prior administrative approval. This is a significant efficiency in that in the past people had to wait for phone list approvals and wait to make changes. Securus and IDOC would point fingers at each other when this process took too long. JHA was pleased to visit the Stateville Northern Reception and Classification Center after this change and not receive complaints, as we did on prior visits, about delays in getting phone number approvals. In contrast, during our April 2019 visit to the Central Reception and Classification Center at Graham CC, staff and prisoners reported that new intake inmates, i.e. people who had not been previously incarcerated, were not being issued PINs until they had been in reception for 60 days, which is a concerningly long stay in intake, but fairly common. We believe the policy at Graham of not issuing a PIN for 60 days at intake relates to problems with meeting the demand for phones. As of the time of this draft reports review, we were still waiting to hear back regarding correction or clarification of this after we requested this internal policy be revised, as it is inconsistent with other reception centers, unnecessary, and was causing significant distress. People in intake were also no longer given any stamped postcards or envelopes, or write-outs, as these were eliminated as a cost-saving measure within IDOC. Therefore, at Graham intake, some people reported they had literally no way to get in touch with anyone other than by breaking the rules by trading and trafficking to get a write-out or by using someone else’s PIN.

The aforementioned change allowing phone numbers to be added to PIN call lists as they are called has had the unintended consequence that people can use other people’s PINs to call whomever they like if that person’s call list is not yet full. In the past, if someone used another’s PIN, they would only have been able to call that person’s family, friends, lawyer, or whomever was on their list. Now, assuming that the person does not have 20 numbers on their list, someone else using that PIN can call anyone they like, and if the call is picked up, the number will be added to the other person’s list. This has also led to some people selling access to their PIN numbers and to others stealing people’s PINs. PINs are people’s visible IDOC identification numbers plus 3 digits. At some facilities, it is apparent that the phone configuration does not afford much privacy, either due to poor design or necessary wiring for adding phones being available only in a confined area. Inmates complain that others crowd their conversations and watch them and sometimes that staff do not enforce any boundaries. People who are already vulnerable in prison—“first timers,” people who are young or elderly, infirmed, etc.—may be targeted for this sort of abuse and misconduct.
Sorting out who is at fault and who should get in trouble when someone uses someone else’s PIN is now becoming a more common disciplinary issue for staff.

Also, in 2019, IDOC inmates can now buy minutes for phone use on commissary; which was a needed improvement to enable incarcerated people to pay for calls to people on the outside who may not have a Securus account set up and funded. However, this phone call debit system is also tied to PINs, which are increasingly subject to potential misuse by others. It is unclear how and when someone would be protected by being issued a new PIN if their PIN were to be appropriated by another person or widely broadcast, or how they could get phone numbers that others added without permission purged from their lists or phone credits refunded for calls they did not place.

IDOC must be strategic in handling some of these issues because things may get worse before they improve as everyone continues to wait for wireless tablet availability, which hopefully will solve some phone demand issues.

Increased Sanctions Relating to Phone Access Issues

The punishment given to people who are incarcerated by staff for using another person’s PIN often seems to be to give the inmate a room restriction or downgrade him to a disciplinary C grade restriction that reduces his privileges. Room restrictions are not subject to a formalized, uniform policy across facilities, or well-tracked, making them concerning; however, on the positive side, they are less harsh sanctions than stays in segregation and do not seem to carry the long-lasting negative implications of people placed on grade restrictions. It is critical that people not be given disciplinary segregation terms for minor infractions; nonetheless, JHA also has concerns regarding some of the alternative disciplinary measures being used to punish prisoners. In particular, JHA has long opposed imposing restrictions on outside communications as a punishment, be it through phone, mail, or visitation restrictions, because access to supports is critical for people’s wellbeing and success.

Grade restrictions, which take away “privileges,” can have wide-reaching consequences. If someone is C graded, this means that the person will not be able to call out on their own PIN for the timeframe that they are in C grade, nor use video visits. In addition, once a person progresses from C grade to B grade, they still will be limited to two phone calls a month and precluded from using video visits. Full institutional privileges, including communication privileges, are not restored until a person has been returned to A grade. During JHA’s March 2019 visit to Pontiac, which is a disciplinary maximum-security facility, nearly 30% of the population was on C grade, meaning they could make no phone calls. In addition to those with grade restrictions, which includes people in disciplinary segregation, those in Administrative Detention (AD) status have phone restrictions limiting call frequency and length of phone calls in different phases, which seem to be purely punitive measures, even though AD is supposed to be a non-disciplinary status, based on security concerns. However, with the exception of attorney-client calls, all calls made by any prisoners can be monitored, and people can and do get in trouble for misconduct on the phone, e.g. making threats, so the rationale for restricting calls and call length is questionable. Although people in AD status report many issues to JHA, several stated that a major hardship is having phone calls with family limited to 15-minutes instead of 30 minutes, or having to choose to only
call one child, when other children live with family at different phone numbers. JHA has requested that this internal policy be revised.

In addition to other negative consequences of C grade as set out in the Administrative Code, often facilities formally or informally require people to wait a period of time, e.g. six months, before they can be eligible for certain assignments, such as school, from when they were on C grade. While this is another mechanism to try to control for high demand and low availability of programming, e.g. spaces in educational classes or work assignments, it does not seem to be a proportionate sanction or outcome, for a minor rules infraction, such as someone seeking to call his Mom on her birthday despite being on phone restriction. Further, because family contact is so essential to prisoners’ sense of stability and wellbeing, those on C grade frequently seek to circumvent phone restrictions and will use someone else’s PIN number because this is the only way they can access the phones and connect with their families. Placing increasingly severe sanctions on prisoners creates a compounding spiral of consequences, such that prisoners can eventually end up in segregation solely for violating phone rules that are unrelated to safety. JHA disapproves of this practice. Discouragingly, people who are incarcerated also report that rules intended to maximize fair access to the phones are not consistently enforced by staff to prevent some prisoners from monopolizing the phone, stealing other prisoners’ PINs, etc., which creates a more hostile and dangerous environment.

To reiterate, JHA believes that failing to meet demand and perpetuating unnecessary scarcity with regard to prisoners' access to communications creates unwanted issues that undermine safety and security. We again recommend that IDOC reconsider the availability and accessibility of phones and other forms of communication, and revisit policies that place restrictions on communications for disciplinary purposes.

**Alternative Communication Methods—Mail, E-Messaging, Video and In-person Visits**

Some may feel that prisoners’ ability to send mail should moderate the need for phones and that while prisoners may have a statutory right to send and receive mail, phone calls are only a “privilege.” However, mail presents other issues; for example, cost—a write-out currently costs 61 cents, twice the cost of a 30-minute phone call. While sometimes prisoners are permitted to send legal mail if they do not have funds in their IDOC trust account, thereby incurring a debt against their trust fund account, there is no reliable, alternative mechanism for people to correspond with people on the outside freely.

Further, more than 70% of the incarcerated respondents for JHA’s 2018 surveys reported that their mail was not timely.
JHA also frequently hears reports of other issues with mail from people who are incarcerated, and from administrators that it is extremely difficult to keep staff working in the mailroom as that position is one of the lower paying and higher turnover areas. Low literacy also prevents some people from using mail, not to mention understanding the extensive rules regarding permissible mail. Lastly, even under the best conditions, communications in society no longer move at the speed of mail, as most people are accustomed to immediate contact via smartphones.

Where it is available, GTL e-messaging, although of limited length and content, costs less than \( \frac{1}{3} \) the price of a write-out at 20 cents, and is typically processed the same day. E-messaging has been reported to be a major improvement by many prisoners and their loved ones. However, even with this service, people often tell JHA that phone calls are important to them to speak with their older family members who are not comfortable with computer technology, or with people who cannot afford the technology, or to communicate with their young children. In the most recently available data from IDOC, the Fiscal Year 2017 Annual Report, more than 61.1% of the people incarcerated in IDOC self-reported being parents of more than 63,992 children, which is likely under-representative. There is a tangible difference between hearing a loved one’s voice and getting an email, which lacks emotion, tone and personal affect. We should ask, whom are we punishing by preventing incarcerated people from speaking to their families; are we being purposely retaliatory against bad actors, or are we harming innocent family members and children? Even if the aim of phone restrictions is intended vengeful retaliation against people who commit serious offenses like murder and sexual assault, IDOC houses more people with relatively minor offenses, including people who have been sent back to IDOC for short term stays as a result of violating technical terms of their parole, aka Mandatory Supervised Release (MSR). People with minor offenses and short stays may be housed in the very same places and conditions as those with more serious offenses. While some incarcerated people may never be returning to society, the vast majority will be returning to our communities in a few years or less, and it is a benefit to us all that they remain connected with their outside supports who play a critical role in successful reentry.

In person visitation also does not provide a reasonable way for most people to stay connected. Most prisoners are incarcerated in facilities that are more than a 3-hour drive from Cook County.
and the six counties that surround Cook, where the majority of incarcerated people are from. The time and expense of travel can make it too costly for many families to visit. Further, limited visiting hours and space constraints, and concerns regarding visitors being mistreated, or non-contact restrictions on visitation, can make visitation unattractive. Hence many rely on phone calls and mail to stay connected. Video visitation has been a welcome supplement in many places; however, it was still much more costly than a phone call, around $12, compared to 30 cents for 30 minutes. JHA also still receives periodic reports of difficulties with scheduling or functionality of the video visitation equipment, as well as difficulty with various rules and restrictions, and this is something we will continue to monitor.

Next Steps

JHA plans to increase our data collection efforts regarding barriers to outside connectedness and communications for people who are incarcerated and their families over the next year, and we hope that improvements will be made under IDOC’s new administration. We believe many of the issues causing phone demand relate to the lack of positive opportunities or positive social interactions inside prisons, as well as serious information poverty within prisons.

We will be launching an online survey for family members to provide input on improving prison conditions including communication, and further refining the surveys we use to obtain feedback from prisoners and staff. So far we know that visitors would appreciate small courtesies such as free lockers to store personal items and car keys; more hand sanitizer availability; better vending machine options and pricing in the visiting rooms (an issue also raised often by administrators at facilities), as well as the ability to transfer vending card balances between facilities when a loved one transfers from one IDOC facility to another. While we also hear that people are deeply appreciative of being able to take photos on visits, as the result of a JHA initiative, there are still issues regarding access, overly restrictive pose limitations, and inconsistency in the policies that allow people to take photos to mail family members who cannot visit. We also continue to encourage the Department to more proactively and productively engage with incarcerated people’s families and outside support systems and establish a Family Member Council to advise IDOC on matters including visitation, communication and assisting loved in reentry upon release. Such efforts increasing transparency and communication can also decrease anxiety.

Connection to the outside world is a critical factor for people’s success; often prisoners must rely on the support of people outside of prisons for information and necessary support, whether this be emotional, logistical, financial, etc. Prisons should not unnecessarily limit access to these important resources. We repeat that it is in Illinois’ interest to do what it can to support people who are incarcerated in maintaining positive and sustained relationships with their social and familial support systems outside prison. As JHA recommended in 2016, it is critical that IDOC work to improve practices to permit greater connectedness between people who are incarcerated and loved ones and improve reentry success, particularly where we know that positive social opportunities within facilities remain slim and the small improvements to facilitate family connectedness will be deeply felt and appreciated. While Illinois has come far in fixing cost issues relating to phone rates, there is still room for much needed improvement.
The following is the Illinois Department of Corrections’ (IDOC’s) written response to JHA’s June 2019 draft report.

In the summer of 2019, JHA invited IDOC to provide written responses to our reports which we would publish in tandem with our reports. JHA provided a draft of this report to IDOC on June 6th, 2019 and JHA received a written response from the Department on August 12th, 2019. IDOC’s response is published herein verbatim and without further JHA comment.

JHA has always engaged in a review process with IDOC, providing the Department an opportunity to read, discuss, comment, respond, or act on JHA feedback from facility reviews as presented in our draft reports. This report is the first to include a written response from the Department. For more information on our review process, please see JHA’s 2017 publication, How JHA’s Prison Monitoring Works, www.thejha.org/method.

We appreciate IDOC’s participation in this process and are encouraged that the Department reports that they have taken or will take action to address some concerns discussed. JHA will continue to monitor these and other issues.

We look forward to continuing to work with all stakeholders to advance reforms needed to achieve a system that is fair, humane and effective.
Telephone Access

Increasing offender access to telephones is a priority for the Illinois Department of Corrections. State law requires the Department bid offender phone services based solely on cost. With phone rates at .009 cents per minute, Securus was awarded the contract in July 2018. The low cost has resulted in increased demand. As a result, IDOC is adding additional phones as needed.

It is difficult to find space for additional phones in some facilities. This is often due to unusable cabling that needs replaced. The Department is addressing the issue, but cable replacement will take several years to complete. Budget constraints also hinders the agency from making these much-needed upgrades. Moving to a combination of a tablet phone and wall phone would ease phone traffic but would require a new contract.

IDOC is reevaluating its current phone and visitation contracts. Newer services are now available from vendors like Securus and GTL that were not five to six years ago. In the future, IDOC could be best served by a new contract for offender services that encompasses all staff and offender needs.

Offender services and the issues that come with it are relatively new to IDOC. A high learning curve exists for the Department on how to manage and implement while keeping up with constantly changing technology. IDOC regularly communicates with other states on offender services matters. Technology continues to improve which requires all jurisdictions to become proactive contractually and operationally.

Telephone Privacy

Due to security needs, phones are typically installed in housing units for ease of use and offender safety. Wall space is limited in most housing units due to numerous existing offender phones. Cell doors, showers, and pipe chase access panels limit where phones are mounted. Again, a tablet phone/wall phone combination would ease the traffic and increase privacy.
GTL Technology

As of January 2019, all facilities have the capability for video visitation, electronic messaging, on-site deposits, legal research and wired tablet programs. Video visits are $6.25 for a 25-minute session, and $13.75 for a 55-minute session. These rates are established by the vendor.

As part of the implementation of the tablet program, GTL offered a small tablet (1.5). The Department was told this tablet would work in either a wired or wireless format. IDOC piloted the wireless format at Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center and Decatur Correctional Center to ensure that wireless would work as expected. After nine months, we found the tablet did not work in “offline mode.” After several months of testing and troubleshooting, GTL came to DOC and indicated that the 1.5 would not work consistently in the wireless mode, and they recommended we instead convert to the 2.0 tablet. We tested this tablet at Kewanee and Decatur for two weeks and found that it consistently worked. We made the decision to move to the 2.0 and set a graduated schedule for sales. From May 20 to June 14, IDOC sold nearly 2,700 tablets. Of those tablets sold, 1,979 were on back order. GTL is providing each of the 1,979 offenders with a $10.00 credit toward subscriptions. Back order tablets have been shipping since July 12 and GTL has indicated that final shipments are scheduled for August 30th.

The wireless network is active at every facility. 21 facilities had sold at least one tablet before sales were halted due to lack of availability. Additionally, IDOC’s telecommunications team is working with GTL to evaluate the wireless networks. There is currently a plan to enhance the networks in the day rooms at several sites due to the volume of sales and the security decision to not allow tablets in the gyms. The Department’s initial configuration had wireless access points in facility gyms to provide for more opportunities for offenders to be “online.” However, the new 2.0 tablet is significantly bigger than the 1.5 and cannot easily be carried in an armband. Acting Chief of Operations John Eilers made the decision to limit the use of the tablets to cells and dayrooms. IDOC will continue to monitor and adjust the networks in the housing units. It should be noted the configuration was not designed for continuous streaming, but for periodic access to upload and download messages and to create playlists for “offline” listening. This will likely need to change to allow for more entertainment and education opportunities.

Former Director John Baldwin directed staff to place the video visitation stations in the housing wings for the statewide implementation. This change resulted in a significant increase in the number of stations required for each facility. The Department asked GTL to handle the wiring at each facility to speed up the installations. We also switched from a wired tablet program to a wireless tablet program.

Some obstacles were out of the Department’s control. For example, the internet service provider for Pontiac Correctional Center gave a six-month timeframe for boring and circuit installation. Also, the internet service provider for Sheridan Correctional Center gave a bid of nearly $750,000
to run line. This resulted in Sheridan having a wireless circuit and a tower built to accommodate the circuit.

**Installation and Repairs**

Visitor Coordinators at every facility are instructed to submit support tickets when equipment is not working. If the issue is not resolved within three business days, the issue is addressed by staff at Central Office. We continue to reiterate to facilities that we not expect them to accept equipment that is inoperable. GTL sends a daily report of outstanding issues and we have weekly calls with GTL to discuss them.

Training has been scheduled for all Visitor Coordinators to address the GTL software components. The training will give staff more information about how the software works.

Because IDOC has chosen to live monitor every visit, limitation on hours is due to staffing. An officer is posted whenever there are scheduled visits and all visits are recorded and retained for the life of the contract.

Below is a table by facility and the average number of visits per month for FY2019.

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<th>Go-live</th>
<th># of Kiosks</th>
<th>Ave # of Monthly Visits</th>
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*Pilot Facilities, stations are in visiting room, however plans are in process to move kiosks to housing units
**Room Restriction**

The only facility where room restriction is utilized is at Dixon Correctional Center as an alternative to segregation placement. This procedure was approved by IDOC’s legal unit. This is utilized for offenders assigned to the Special Treatment Center. The maximum amount of time an offender can be placed in investigative status is 30 days. Additionally, the decision to place the offender on investigative status may be based on the aggressiveness of the offender, the threat posed to the safety and security of the facility or any person, the need to restrict the offenders access to the general population to protect the individual from injury or to conduct an investigation, the seriousness of the offense committed, or contraindication for placement determined by a mental health professional. Offenders get the same out-of-cell time as offenders placed in restrictive housing.

**Graham Reception and Classification Center**

Graham Correctional Center will be requesting a variance to the Administrative Directive as it pertains to the issuance of PIN numbers and the time frames that are mandated. At this time, the Administrative Directive stipulates an offender is allowed (1) 10-minute collect phone call while in the first 60-days of reclassification status. Graham is requesting a variance to this Directive to reflect and stipulate that an offender may receive his PIN number during the intake process. This would allow an offender to have the ability to immediately communicate with family when time is allotted for phone usage.

As for concerns pertaining to “write-outs,” Graham’s Inmate Benefit Fund allowed for the purchase of (1) write-out per offender upon intake. However, the facility has since stopped that practice as it became a funding issue. By implementing the issuance of PIN numbers upon intake and processing, the offenders will have the immediate ability to communicate with family and friends. The facility added (2) more phones for increased access by offenders in all dayrooms and living areas of the facility. By doing so, this created the need for the phone “booths” to be removed to make room for the additions. The space utilized for the additional phones has been well worth the sacrifice of the privacy booths as this has provided more opportunities for offenders to communicate.

**C-Grade Status**

All offenders at Pontiac Correctional Center who are in disciplinary segregation are automatically placed in “C” grade per Departmental Rule 504.

There should not be negative consequences for offenders just coming off “C” grade; however, Wardens do review an offender’s disciplinary history prior to placing them in
certain assignments where there are waiting lists. It would not necessarily be the “C grade that is the cause for not receiving certain assignments, but the disciplinary history of the offender.

**Write-outs**

Pricing is set by the vendor and is based on national standards. However, offenders are given one card upon intake.

The Department continues to work at maintaining fluidity in processing the delivery of mail while emphasizing to our administrators to be proactive in the retention of staff in the position and seek to temporarily assign staff until a vacancy is filled.

**Next Steps**

IDOC plans to collect data on the number of offenders and family members who use electronic messages. We will also work to make sure families are aware of the system and how to use it. The Department will analyze its current procedures and make appropriate changes to ensure both electronic and USPS mail is operating as efficiently as possible.

The Department will continue to work on developing re-entry units and build upon family reunification. IDOC is developing creative strategies to encourage families to be engaged in the re-entry planning process. The greater the feeling of connectedness an offender has with his or her family and community, the more likely they are to re-enter their community successfully. The Department is committed to enhancing partnerships with outside agencies to link families with necessary services.

As Rob Jeffreys continues to transition into his role as Director of the Illinois Department of Corrections, he is evaluating the agency and making necessary improvements. Director Jeffreys recognizes the importance of offenders being connected to their families as they reintegrate into their communities.