



MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM
Citizens working to reform criminal justice in Maryland



www.MA4JR.org

Annapolis Friends Peace and Justice Center
351 Dubois Rd., Annapolis, MD 21401
info@ma4jr.org

Testimony in support of SB948 State Correctional Facilities - Incarcerated Individuals - Costs of Telephone Communications

My name is Judith Lichtenberg. I am testifying on behalf of the [Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform](http://www.MA4JR.org) (MAJR), where I serve on the executive committee and co-chair its Behind the Walls Workgroup. I have lived in Hyattsville/University Park (District 22) for forty years and am professor emerita of philosophy at Georgetown University. Since 2016, I've been teaching, tutoring, and mentoring at Jessup Correctional Institute, Patuxent Institution, and the DC Jail. I have gotten to know many people behind the walls as my students and have learned much about what goes on there.

Prison telecom corporations charge families with incarcerated loved ones as much as a dollar a minute for a simple phone call. Preying on these families, the industry rakes in \$1.4 billion annually and pays hundreds of millions in kickbacks, also called commissions, to correctional agencies.

As a result, one in three families with an incarcerated loved one falls into debt trying to stay connected; of those carrying this burden, 87% are women — largely Black and brown women. Families should not have to choose between paying rent and paying for calls with their loved ones behind bars.

The COVID-19 pandemic only made things worse. Like everyone else, families with incarcerated loved ones faced job losses and the unexpected costs of eldercare and childcare. It exacerbated a crisis that incarcerated people and their families have been living with for decades.

This exploitation affects not just families, including children of incarcerated parents, but also correctional staff and public safety. Incarcerated people in close contact with their communities are more likely to have hope, participate in rehabilitative programs, and engage in positive behavior while inside and to reenter successfully upon release.

Some states and counties have begun to implement policies to make prison and jail communication free. California, Connecticut, Colorado, Massachusetts, and Minnesota have all passed laws to make communication free. On behalf of the Maryland Alliance for

Justice Reform, I urge you to give a favorable report to SB948 so that Maryland can join these other states.

Respectfully,

Judith Lichtenberg
Hyattsville, MD
District 22
301.814.7120
jalichtenberg@gmail.com