

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 948

State Correctional Facilities - Incarcerated Individuals - Costs of Telephone Communications

TO: Hon. Will C. Smith, Chair, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Job Opportunities Task Force

DATE: March 5, 2024

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that develops and advocates policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-wage workers and job seekers in Maryland. **JOTF supports Senate Bill 948, which would prohibit a State correctional facility and a telephone service provider from charging an incarcerated individual or a third party, including the recipient of a telephone call, for an incarcerated individual's use of telephone equipment or telephone services in a State correctional facility.**

Each 15-minute phone call costs a Maryland inmate approximately 48 cents. The minimum wage for unskilled positions with Maryland Correctional Enterprises is \$2.16 per day. This means that incarcerated individuals can use up to a fourth of their daily paycheck on a mere 30-minute phone call. Considering these factors, the struggles that arise from this system should not be surprising. Of course public safety is a concern when children are unable to keep in consistent contact with an incarcerated parent because communication is too expensive, and thus have psychological trauma and run afoul of the law as a result. Of course recently returning citizens struggle with homelessness and employment when they were unable to keep in consistent contact with their support systems outside the wall and strategize prior to their release because communication is too expensive. Of course the chances of successfully reintegrating into society plummet when an incarcerated person develops mental health issues from their experience and is unable to get support from their loved ones because communication is too expensive. The inability for incarcerated people to speak with the people who care about them directly correlates with the likelihood of negative outcomes post-release.

Senate Bill 948 would address this by taking the financial burden of phone calls in a correctional facility away from the incarcerated individual. Making a person choose between a meager amount of conversation with a partner, sibling, child, or parent or saving the literal cents that they so desperately need because of the below poverty wages they earn is cruel. If public safety is of a concern for Marylanders, deconstructing policies that actively sever one's tether to their humanity is a good place to start.

For these reasons, JOTF supports Senate Bill 948 and urges a favorable report.

For more information, contact:

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