

My name is Alyssa Ackbar, and I am a Policy Campaign Associate at Worth Rises, a national non-profit dedicated to ending the exploitation of people impacted by incarceration. We have helped jurisdictions across the country pass and implement policies that make communication free for incarcerated people and their support networks, including in Connecticut, California, Minnesota, Massachusetts, and Colorado. With this legislation, Maryland has the opportunity to join these other states in providing overdue relief to millions of families with incarcerated loved ones, by simply making communication free.

Maryland families currently pay the state's prison telecom vendor, Global Tel Link, an estimated \$12.3 million each year to speak to their incarcerated loved ones. Families are often forced to choose between paying for basic necessities, housing, and food and paying to hear the voices of their incarcerated loved ones. In fact, one in three families with an incarcerated loved one goes into debt trying to stay connected, and 87% of those bearing this enormous financial burden are women.^[1]

Family support can change how successful a person is both during and after their incarceration. It increases hope, reduces desperation, and encourages positive behavior, which in turn reduces violence and improves the correctional environment for incarcerated people and correctional officers alike.

Further, incarcerated people who maintain connection with their family and community during their incarceration have a better chance at successfully reentering the community upon release. With their families help, they are more likely to secure housing and employment and generally have transition support. This increased success also translates into lower recidivism and increased public safety.^[4]

Based on our work across the country, we estimate that providing free phone calls to incarcerated people and their loved ones will save Maryland families \$12.3 million annually, and cost the state \$3.0 million per year. This fiscal assessment assumes that Maryland is able to secure similar rates to other states that have prioritized low costs, or specifically one cent per minute, as charged roughly in Illinois and New Hampshire. At current phone call volumes, which are not expected to change given current usage, providing free phone calls to Maryland families would cost the state \$3.0 million per year.

We urge the committee to vote yes on SB 948 and provide this necessary relief to Maryland's communities.
