



## MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Citizens working to reform criminal justice in Maryland



[www.MA4JR.org](http://www.MA4JR.org)

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### Testimony in support of HB1366

#### 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 huge fees for a simple phone call. The industry makes large profits and pays hundreds of millions of dollars in "commissions" to prison systems. As a result, one in three families with an incarcerated loved one goes into debt trying to stay connected.

Families should not have to choose between paying rent and paying for calls with their loved ones behind bars. Incarcerated people in close contact with their families and communities are more likely to stay hopeful and to participate and succeed in rehabilitative programs; they're more likely to return successfully to society when released. Expensive phone calls affect not just families, including children of incarcerated parents, but also correctional staff and the public at large.

Some states—California, Connecticut, Colorado, Massachusetts, and Minnesota—have passed laws to make communication free. On behalf of the Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform, I urge you to give a favorable report to HB1366 so that Maryland can join these other states and help prisoners, their families, and our communities.

Respectfully,

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