

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 56

State Correctional Facilities - Incarcerated Individuals - Costs of Telephone Communications

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

FROM: Center for Urban Families

DATE: January 9, 2024

The Center for Urban Families, a workforce development and family strengthening organization based in West Baltimore, supports Senate Bill 56, which reduces the cost of jail phone calls for incarcerated individuals and their families starting in July 2026 for FY 27. It would also establish an advisory committee to review and study the experience in other states that have made this policy change at a much lower cost per minute and lower overall cost in conjunction with the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) and other stakeholders.

Almost all incarcerated individuals will be released back into the community. Consequently, the community, taxpayers, DPSCS, the Administration, legislature, and the inmates have an interest in their successful re-entry. Staying connected to ones family and friends through telephonic communication is proven to increase the chance of successful re-entry. This bill would decrease recidivism rates and save the taxpayers an estimated \$50,000-\$60,000 per inmate. Not only does it save money, but it also decreases crime.

Our coalition partner, Worth Rises has led successful campaigns in several other states and large counties and has done so at much lower costs than our state is paying the current vendor at this time. For instance, under the current contract the vendor is charging 3.2 cents per minute while other states are paying less than 2 cents per minute.

The Advisory Committee that includes DPSCS will review other states' policies and make recommendations to the Administration and the legislature regarding the best and most cost-effective way to implement this bill.

For these reasons, the Center for Urban Families supports Senate Bill 56 and urges a favorable report.