

## **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: **Michele Kennedy-Kouadio, Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform MAJR,**

**District 20 Voter**

DATE: January 9, 2024

**MAJR Michele Kennedy-Kouadio supports Senate Bill 56, which shifts the cost of telephone calls from incarcerated individuals and their families to the state starting in July 2026, 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. My son will be one of them.

Consequently, the community, taxpayers, DPSCS, the Administration, legislature, and of course the inmates have an interest in their successful re-entry. My son and his family and friends benefit from regular telephone communication

My son earns \$20 a month for a work schedule that is 160 hours a month. I pay commissary, food and communication costs. Reducing my cost for telephone communications would help me and many other families struggling to support themselves and their family or friends behind the walls in Maryland prisons. Telephone access is a life line when people in prison suffer from lack of essential medical, psychiatric or dental needs.

Regular affordable communication will contribute to the decrease the recidivism rate and thereby reduce the number of those incarcerated saving the taxpayers \$50,000-\$60,000 per inmate. Not only does it save taxpayers and the state money but it also improves public safety by decreasing 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 only paying less than 1 cent to about 2 cents per minute thereby reducing overall costs by up to two-thirds.

The Advisory Committee that includes DPSCS will review other states and make recommendations to the Administration and the legislature regarding the best and most cost effective way of proceeding in making this policy successful. This bill will promote successful re-entry, reduce recidivism, reduce crime thereby improving public safety and can be done at a much lower cost.

Finally, because we are aware of the current budget challenges we have a delayed effective date of July

2026 rather than 2025.

**For these reasons, MAJR Michele Kennedy-Kouadio supports Senate Bill 56 and urges a favorable report.**