



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: Dwan Burton, Deputy Director for Out for Justice

DATE: January 9, 2025

Out for Justice, Inc. (OFJ) is an organization comprised of individuals directly and indirectly impacted by the criminal legal system advocating for reforming policies and practices that adversely affect successful reintegration into society. **OFJ supports Senate Bill 56**, which shifts the cost of telephone calls from incarcerated individuals and their families to the state 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.

In the State of Maryland, many of our families live below the poverty line and are grappling with increased living expenses. It is an essential need for incarcerated individuals to maintain affordable and accessible communication with their family, friends, and advocates. Access to phone calls and other communication methods is not a luxury—it is a lifeline. It ensures that incarcerated individuals can navigate legal processes, manage personal responsibilities, and address their basic human needs.

Maintaining communication with loved ones is vital for the mental health and well-being of incarcerated individuals. Many of these individuals are parents, siblings, or partners who rely on regular contact to support their children, maintain family bonds, and address personal affairs. For parents in particular, these calls are crucial for participating in their children's lives, whether that involves assisting with school decisions, offering emotional support, or ensuring their children's safety and stability.

For those navigating the complexities of the justice system, affordable access to phone calls enables them to collaborate with legal counsel, connect with advocates, and gather the necessary



information to support their cases. Their ability to mount a meaningful defense is severely hindered without this access.

Unfortunately, the current cost of communication for incarcerated individuals and their families is exorbitantly high, creating unnecessary barriers that disproportionately affect low-income and marginalized communities. Families often bear the financial burden of these costs, and many are forced to choose between staying connected and meeting other basic needs. This financial strain undermines the rehabilitative goals of incarceration and perpetuates cycles of poverty and disconnection.

By addressing these barriers, we can ensure that all incarcerated individuals have equitable access to communication, which is critical for maintaining their dignity, supporting their rehabilitation, and ultimately fostering safer communities.

For these reasons, Out for Justice supports Senate Bill 56 and urges a favorable report.