

Dear **Members of the Judiciary Committee,**

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with Out 4 Justice. **I am a resident of Maryland State District 40, living in the Medfield neighborhood of Baltimore. I am testifying in support of HB0401 - State Correctional Facilities - Incarcerated Individuals - Costs of Telephone Communications.**



Showing Up for Racial Justice

When almost everyone has a phone in their pocket, it's easy to forget that there are some groups of people who can't take that connectivity for granted. Access to telephones by inmates of our jails and prisons is restricted, but phones may be even more important inside the walls than outside, as phone calls are one of the few ways incarcerated people have to stay connected with their community. We should be encouraging that connectivity, since we as a society benefit when people returning from incarceration are able to reintegrate rather than facing isolation and a lack of resources that might drive them back into the court system.

People in prison don't have their choice of service providers, but they and their families pay all the costs. This has resulted in a monopoly system where phone providers charge unfair and excessive fees amounting to 48 cents per 15-minute call for state prisons¹, and up to \$3.15 per 15-minute call for local jails². These companies are shamefully exploiting incarcerated people and their families. The problem has become so bad that the FCC recently took steps to reign in this overcharging³; unfortunately, given the Trump administration's open hostility to business regulation of all kinds, it is questionable whether the FCC under his leadership will finalize rules limiting the fees and rates on intrastate calls.

HB0401 would protect incarcerated people and their families from predatory pricing by making the facilities themselves responsible for the cost of providing telephone service to inmates. While this will initially raise costs for the state, this change will incentivize negotiation for better rates, which would lower costs. In the long run, this relatively small cost increase for the state will reap dividends by reducing the financial burden on the families of inmates - who are often impoverished themselves - and decreasing recidivism by fostering positive family and community ties for incarcerated people.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of HB0401 - State Correctional Facilities - Incarcerated Individuals - Costs of Telephone Communications.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Christina Bell
1301 W 42nd St., Baltimore, Md 21211
Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore

¹ State of Phone Justice 2022, Prison Policy Initiative, Appendix Table 1: https://www.prisonpolicy.org/phones/appendices2022_1.html

² *Id.*, Appendix Table 3: https://www.prisonpolicy.org/phones/appendices2022_3.html

³ <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/incarcerated-peoples-communications-services>