



## **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 401**

### **State Correctional Facilities - Incarcerated Individuals - Costs of Telephone Communications**

TO: Delegates Roberson, Amprey, Kaufman, J. Long, Pasteur, Wilkins, and Woods and Members of the House Judiciary

FROM: Dwan Burton, Deputy Director for Out for Justice

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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 House Bill 401**, 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 essential 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 House Bill 401 and urges a favorable report.