



Showing Up for Racial Justice

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am submitting this testimony as a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to mobilize white people in a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are working in support of and collaboration with Out for Justice, which advocates for the reform of policies and practices that adversely affect incarcerated people's successful reintegration into society. **I am testifying in support of HB0401 - State Correctional Facilities - Incarcerated Individuals - Costs of Telephone Communications.**

Access to telephones by inmates of our jails and prisons is restricted, yet phone calls are one of the few ways incarcerated people stay connected with their loved ones. We should be encouraging that connectivity, since we as a society benefit when people returning from incarceration are able to reintegrate into their families and communities rather than facing the isolation and lack of resources that might drive them back into the court system.

People in prison don't have any choice of service providers, but they and their families pay all the costs associated with these precious links to their families and friends. This has resulted in a monopoly where phone providers charge unfair and excessive fees amounting to 48 cents per 15-minute call for state prisons, and up to \$3.15 per 15-minute call for local jails. These companies are shamefully exploiting incarcerated people and their families by charging captive clients rates well over what phone service customers pay in the outside world. The FCC recently took steps to reign in this overcharging; 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,
Dr. Katherine Blaha
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