

"PHONE JUSTICE"

Why is there such AWE and SHOCK, in Prison Phone Rates? This practice, just like many other practices of Department of Corrections (DOC's) around the country, is by systematic design. But this blame doesn't stop at the DOC's door, it is immensely more complex than that; LETS LOOK AT IT:

THE PHONE COMPANIES.....

The phone companies make tremendous amounts of money from prison phone rates, and, it is usually one company for each state's DOC's. That one phone company has a monopoly over the entire state's prison phone system.

However, can you truly fault the phone companies for getting that "money?" This is a democratically elected government, who's main principle is based on private and free enterprise. CAPITALISM IS THE MODE OF THE DAY! So it is the phone companies prerogative to bring money into their coffers. That is how any company prospers, builds equity, is able to hire new employees, pay existing employees, so, that, not only are families able to provide for their families; but the government prospers thru taxation paid by that company. That is the american way.

So, again, are the phone companies the blame? Not for being true to their nature and creed. Myself personally, I say no! Then whom does that leave to point the finger at? The "true" culprits!!!! I believe the phone companies to be the lesser of all the evils, in this country wide conspiracy.

Now lets look at the state governments that pass legislation, that allows these state statutes to be enacted. Why, allow these phone companies to act so brazen, charge outrageous phone rates, and make exorbitant amounts of money? OF COURSE YOU KNOW WHY!!!!

- 1) We're prisoners-duly convicted
- 2) The money
- 3) The money, the money, the money..."What else is there?

Each state gets colossal kick backs from the phone companies; LETS LOOK AT IT: In the May 2012, issue of PRISON LEGAL NEWS (PLN VOL 23 No. 5); there is an article in there titled, "Eighth Circuit Affirms No First Amendment Right to Lower Prison Phone Rates".

"On January 21, 2012, a U.S. District Court (Eighth Circuit Court), affirmed a ruling, that the Arkansas Department of Corrections (ADC), did not violate prisoner's First Amendment Rights, by charging expensive phone rates."

The ADC contracted their phone services to Global Tel Link (GTL). Under the ADC and GTL contract, the ADC gets a 45% "commission" on the income the phone company receives from all prisoner phone calls.

There's a \$3.00 surcharge plus \$0.12 per minute for all local calls, and a \$3.95 surcharge plus \$0.45 per minute for out of state calls. ADC averages \$2 million in "commissions" annually...\$2 million! I SAID, \$2,000,000 million dollars! CAN...YOU...SAY...CHU-CHING!!!!

AND, that brings us to the next villian in this little charade, AND, probably the biggest villian of them all. THE COURTS!! They are the protectors of the U.S. Constitution, yet, they are the ones that circumvent the laws and uphold these outlandish practices perpetrated by the DOC's and the states. You see I place no blame on the phone companies, to me, the main villians are the DOC's, state governments, and the justice system. They pass laws that puts undue financial strain on our families, and I think violate antitrust laws.

All these entities understand and know that prisoners have few options when it comes to communication with the outside world:

- 1) Mail-letters, cards, postcards
- 2) visits
- 3) phone calls

Letter writing is by far the cheapest form of communication, and out of the three forms of communication, the least liked. WHY?

Some people just aren't letter writers, and lots of people hate writing it is not in their DNA. Out of the three, it is also the hardest, to put your true thoughts and expressions on paper, so people just can't do that. Like me, I used to hate writing. I was horrible at it, my spelling was horrible and my penmanship was a eye sore. But then I have been down 16 plus years, and I will tell you this, my penmanship is still a eye sore, and I have 4 dictionaries on my bed now as I type this blog. The difference is is that I know my options are extremely limited. I don't get visits, I call one person, so all I have is communication thru the mail. I have come to love my writings, very much so, that I have two blog sites now. Now my grammar and punctuation may not be English lit material, but, hey, it works for me.

Then there's phone calls, the second best form of communication with the outside world. To know that someone loves you enough to accept a collect call feels good, to be able to hear your loved ones voice, to be able to escape this reality for just a little bit, is priceless. It is truly kind of hard to express the true depths of emotions that flow thru you, when you call is accepted. Because that person on the other end has some vested interest in you to accept this collect call; that is going to take money out their pockets in these trying and tumultuously financial times. It feels good. However, it is by far the most expensive out of the three, PER MINUTE.

Now we come to the Crown Jewel, of the three...VISITS! Visits are the CREME DE LA CREME, of the trio. You get to visually see your loved ones, touch them, feel them; smell them and taste them (get your dirty minds out the gutter!), there's no way to really explain nor express the sensation you feel from seeing your family for a few hours. The love, joy, and sense of peace you get from your family, is priceless, undescrivable...even if, just for a few hours, *that's love.*

However, visits can be few-and-far-in-between, as well as costly. Sometimes, prisons are hundreds of miles from your home and family. The cost associated with visits can hurt financially. Most families don't have the money to travel like that, especially, with work, school, etc, etc. So visits are extremely special.

In the same May 2012, issue of PLN, there's an article titled, "Arizona DOC Makes Visitors Pay for Prison Maintenance, Repairs." The Arizona DOC, is making visitors pay a \$25 fee for background checks. Background checks are done on anyone who wishes to visit someone at a prison. However, what the state of Arizona, is doing is charging \$25 for a service that is free. Background checks don't cost the DOC a penny, yet, Arizona, is getting away with this.

This stunt could make people reluctant to visit. A \$25 fee on top of all the other pricey cost of visiting a prisoner, i.e., gas, outlandish vending machine cost, the costs of photos, and if you wish to come back the next day the cost of a hotel room. Now a \$25 surcharge on top of all that! And, again, they talk about the Military Industrial Complex-what about the Prison Industrial Complex!?! And they call us criminals!

That's why prisoners in California, were smuggling in cell phones. Until the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), started installing a Cell Phone Jamming System. This system blocks cell phone transmissions within the prison. Since it's installation the CDCR has intercepted over 4,000 cell phone calls, texts and internet access attempts. Also, since, then prison phone calls thru the "prison" have increased 64%. Money thru phone calls is big business and big money, there's no way the state is going to get cheated out of their proper chop. Nothing comes between the DOC and their money, either!

This affects prisoners and their families, in several ways; monetarily, mentally, emotionally and psychologically. To have these excessively high cost tacked on to phone calls can put asunder you and your loved ones. Because you want to talk, yet, the price is so expensive! What do you do?

We are blessed here (If you can call it that) in Wisconsin, they "ONLY" charge us \$0.12 for in state calls and \$0.18 for out of state calls. There is no connecting surcharge, but that just changed in the past year or so. All my calls are interstate, I have no family in the state of Wisconsin, but I am blessed to have Sandra, in my life, or I would have nobody in my corner. And I love talking to her, she brightens up my usually lonely existence. Nevertheless, I try not to call her too much, \$5.40 adds up.

I have no clue how to even express how to fight these phone rate charges, especially, since the state governments pass statute laws giving the DOC's a thumbs up, and the power to promulgate their own rules and regulations. And the judicial system, basically rubber stamps it.

So it is for prisoners and their families to regulate their phone calls. Engage in more letter writing correspondence, thru the mail. I know it's hard to hear your loved one's voice is life sustaining. It is hard to be surrounded daily by chaos and to be in such an uncaring environment. Yes, it is extremely, hard to stay off the phone, nevertheless, we "must" find a perfect balance, ourselves. Because we will get no relief thru the states, or, judicial system; and our families continue to foot the bill for these outrageous charges.

Marteze Harris #161543
Waupun Correctional Institution
Post Office Box 351
Waupun, Wisconsin
53963

Respectfully,



Marteze