

Subject: Re: OP-Ed: Mississippi Jail Telephone Rates Out of Control

From:

To:

Cc:

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On Mon, Jul 23, 2018 at 5:48

wrote:

Jail Telephone Rates are exorbitantly expensive and unjustly punish families with loved ones who are incarcerated.

With rates as high as 90 cents a minute, it can be cheaper to call Singapore than to speak to someone in Jail in Mississippi.

The financial costs are largely shouldered by women who foot the bill for these calls 87 percent of the time. This can be a crippling financial burden on women who already struggle to make ends meet, forcing low-income women of color to choose between groceries or rent or talking to a family member. An overwhelming majority of these mothers, wives, sisters, aunts and grandmothers spend as much as one third of their income on telephone calls with their loved ones. Those who make less than \$15,000.00 per year suffer the further cruelty of losing touch with their loved ones just because they are poor, with 58 percent of these families unable to afford the high call rates.

Mississippi is a prime example of the need for fair and consistent regulation of prison telephone rates. Corruption runs rampant within the State's Prison phone industry, with Global Tel Link, one of the leading providers of prison phone calls, recently paying \$2.5 million to settle a Lawsuit tied to a bribery scheme in 2017, Mississippi's Attorney General sued 10 individuals and 12 companies seeking repayment of State money saying the companies are responsible for bribes paid by their agents to then Mississippi's Correction Commissioner Christopher Epps. Epps is serving nearly 20 years in prison for crimes connected to \$1.4 million in bribes he took.

After State based reforms this year, Mississippi prisons charge more affordable rates, even as the State is taking steps to block contraband cell phones from getting in to prisons. However, according to a 2017 Federal Communication Commission Filing, Mississippi Jails served by Global Tel Link charge as much as 78 cents per minute, raising the price for a 15 minute call to nearly \$11.00.

Global Tel Link is not the only Mississippi prison phone provider preying on low-income families, as the Jails served by the phone company Securus charge 50 cents per minute and \$7.50 for a 15 minute phone call. the reforms taken by Mississippi provide relief to low-income families on the prison level, but in order to institute a consistent fairness for all incarcerated people and their families, lower recidivism and make communities safer, Mississippi jails must also follow suit.

Reducing recidivism is unnecessarily jeopardized by Jail phone rates that are too expensive, with research proving that regular contact between people who are incarcerated and their families leading to better outcomes upon release. However, those incarcerated individuals unable to maintain contact

with loved ones find themselves back behind bars 52 percent of the time within three years of their release.

The financial burden of prison telephone calls is devastating low-income women not only in Mississippi but nationwide as well. The absence of a cap on prison phone rates leave scores of women in debt and forgoing basic necessities in order to stay connected with loved ones. In addition to creating financial hurdles to family communication, this separation contributes greatly to the revolving door of incarcerated people being sent back to prison a few years after their release. We need more people connecting to those incarcerated, not fewer. We need policies that keep families together and make our communities safer.

While the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) took action in the previous years to adopt consistent rules across the Country, a recent Court decision has called those rules into question. In response, a bipartisan group of Senators has introduced Legislation to give FCC back the authority to stop this abuse. The Inmate Calling Technical Correction Act, S.2520 will clarify Congress intends to protect all consumers from this broken system, including rates to connect people in Jails. The Prison Phone Justice Coalition is asking members of the Public to join its effort to seek a hearing for this Legislation in the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, Senator Roger Wicker, Chair of the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, Innovation and the Internet, should co-sponsor this Legislation and support its passage.

Prisoners Rights Advocate
Grassroots Alliance for Justice

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> *August 21 Nationwide Prison Strike Demands*

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> 1. Immediate improvements to the conditions of prisons and prison
> policies that recognize the humanity of imprisoned men and women.

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> 2. An immediate end to prison slavery. All persons imprisoned in any
> place of detention under United States jurisdiction must be paid the
> prevailing wage in their state or territory for their labor.

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> 3. The Prison Litigation Reform Act must be rescinded, allowing
> imprisoned humans a proper channel to address grievances and violations
> of their rights.

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> 4. The Truth in Sentencing Act and the Sentencing Reform Act must be
> rescinded so that imprisoned humans have a possibility of rehabilitation
> and parole. No human
> shall be sentenced to Death by Incarceration or serve any sentence
> without the possibility of parole.

>

> 5. An immediate end to the racial overcharging, over-sentencing, and
> parole denials of Black and brown humans. Black humans shall no longer
> be denied parole because the victim of the crime was white, which is a
> particular problem in southern states.

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> 6. An immediate end to racist gang enhancement laws targeting Black
> and brown humans.

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> 7. No imprisoned human shall be denied access to rehabilitation
> programs at their place of detention because of their label as a violent
> offender.

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> 8. State prisons must be funded specifically to offer more
> rehabilitation services.

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> 9. Pell grants must be reinstated in all US states and territories.

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> 10. The voting rights of all confined citizens serving prison sentences,
> pretrial detainees, and so-called "ex-felons" must be counted.
> Representation is demanded. All voices count.

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> <https://incarceratedworkers.org/campaigns/prison-strike-2018>

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