



Senator Josh Becker, 13th Senate District

SB 1008 – Keep Families Connected Act

Free Telecommunications for Currently Incarcerated People in Jails and Prisons

IN BRIEF

SB 1008 eliminates telecommunication fees for all communications to and from currently incarcerated people in California's local jails and state prisons.

BACKGROUND

Telecommunication costs for currently incarcerated people and their families are an unnecessary financial barrier to basic communication. These services include phone calls, video conferencing, electronic messages, and other communication services.

Currently, county fees are capped at 7 cents per minute for phone calls, with money that must be preloaded into counties' unique telecom systems. Rate caps have greatly increased access to communication services; however, charging any rate at all creates an additional cost burden for connection between incarcerated people and their families.

THE PROBLEM

The current structure of telecommunications in local and state correctional facilities prioritizes profits over people. Communication is not only a basic right, but an essential part of creating an environment for successful reentry.

Under existing laws, money acts as a barrier to reentry services and limits supportive capacities for incarcerated people and their families. Navigating the reentry process can be difficult for anyone, but when all communications require additional fees, it disincentivizes support in the first place.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, one-third of families in the United States with an incarcerated loved one went into debt attempting to stay connected. A disproportionate amount of these costs fell on women, with 87% of women carrying the burden of these communication fees. The economic downfalls of the pandemic have only exacerbated the financial impact of staying in contact with incarcerated loved ones.

The state also operates on a county-by-county system for telecommunication fees, which creates additional problems if an incarcerated person is transferred to another county. Loved ones who preloaded money into

the previous county's communication portal must then request a refund in an often lengthy and complicated process. Doing so often delays essential communications even further, and exacerbates feelings of isolation for the incarcerated family member.

THE SOLUTION

SB 1008 eliminates fees charged for telephone and other communication services between people held in local jails and state prisons and loved ones on the outside.

Free communication services will support strong relationships between incarcerated people and their loved ones, promoting successful reentry and reducing recidivism. SB 1008 will also support reentry by making outside resources more accessible to all parties, without the additional fees associated with basic communication.

By establishing free communication, incarcerated people can connect with their support systems to plan for their release, including finding a job and housing.

Communication and support systems are an integral part of the human experience. Cutting incarcerated people off from their loved ones hurts the individual, the family, and a chance at successful reintegration.

SUPPORT

San Francisco Financial Justice Project (co-sponsor)
Western Center on Law and Poverty (co-sponsor)
Worth Rises (co-sponsor)
Empowering Women Impacted by Incarceration (co-sponsor)
Insight Center for Community Economic Development (co-sponsor)
Jesse's Place Organization (co-sponsor)
Legal Services for Prisoners with Children/All of Us or None (co-sponsor)
Sister Warriors Freedom Coalition (co-sponsor)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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