**S1771/A4576 Prison and Jail Phone Rates Bill Fact Sheet[[1]](#endnote-1)\***

S1771, sponsored by Senator Turner and co-sponsored by Senator Weinberg, and A4576, sponsored by Assemblyman Johnson and Assemblyman Wimberly, will:

* Cap NJ prison and jail phone rates at the FCC state prison cap of 11 cents per minute
* Ban commissions, or kickbacks, on calls currently 50% to 70% in some NJ jails
* Require contracts to go to vendors providing the lowest per minute calling rate
* Require inmate calling service to be provided
* Cap international calls at 25 cents per minute
* Require inmate calling systems to provide reasonable security measures

The bill will incur \*\***no cost\*\*** to the state, as the state Department of Corrections (DOC) has already voluntarily eliminated commissions on calls from state-run facilities, as of February 2014.

The FCC state prison cap is well above the recently negotiated 4.4 cent per minute rate currently in effect in state prisons. Jails whose service is tied to the state contract also provide calls at the 4.4 cent per minute rate. Only four counties currently contract independently for Inmate Calling Service: Bergen, Cape May, Passaic and Salem. Their prices remain exorbitant and create a burden for those incarcerated and for their families. See the table below based on information received through OPRA requests.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **NJ Count****y**  **& Authorized Jail Capacity** | **Distance** | **Current Cost of 15 Minute Call** | **Commission** | **New Cost of 15 Minute Call with Proposed Cap** |
| ***Bergen-1259***  [provider:  Global Tel\*Link] | Local | $1.65 (debit)  $1.75 (collect) | 60.5% | $1.65 |
| Intra LATA (within county) | $4.80  $4.95 |
| Inter LATA (outside county) | $7.30  $7.50 |
| Interstate | $3.15  $3.75 | None |
| ***Cape May-276, Passaic-1283,***  ***Salem-464***  [provider: Securus] | Intrastate | $4.25 | 70.1% Cape May, 53% Passaic,  50% Salem | $1.65 |
| Interstate | $3.15  $3.75 | None |
|  |  |  |

Consider that you can generally earn seven dollars per week working full-time in a correctional facility. This means people held in the Bergen jail would have to work full-time for one week to earn enough money for a fifteen-minute call outside the county! As far as individuals who will be released back into the community, their ability to maintain connections with family and community can only help with their readjustment upon re-entry.

***We urge you to pass S1771/A4576***!

**Immigration Detention and International Calling**

As many as 2,100 people can be held in five facilities in New Jersey under contract with the Department of Homeland Security’s Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Immigrant detainees are generally in Newark ICE or New York ICE custody but also may be transferred in from anywhere in the country. As a result, they are particularly in need of reasonable phone rates and especially vulnerable to abusive interstate and international rates.

**International Rates in NJ Immigration Detention Facilities Compared With Proposed Rates**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Facility Operator, Authorized Capacity & Capacity for detainees in ICE custody** | **Current Cost of a 15 Minute International Call** | **Cost of a 15 Minute Int’l Call under Proposed Rate Cap** |
| ***Bergen-1259***  Capacity for 195 detainees | $19.80 | $3.75 |
| ***Essex-2434***  Capacity for 800 detainees | $17.85 |
| ***Hudson-2080***  Capacity for 450 detainees | $45.00[[2]](#endnote-2) |
| ***Delaney Hall (private facility contracted with Essex County)***  Capacity for 450 detainees | $3.75[[3]](#endnote-3) |
| ***Elizabeth Detention Center (private facility contracted with ICE)***  Capacity for 300 detainees | $2.25 (to landlines)  $5.25 (to mobile phones) |

Detainees need to be able make calls, not only to stay in touch with loved ones but also to make arrangements for possible deportation and to prepare their immigration cases. Immigration proceedings are civil proceedings, so detainees have no right to government appointed counsel, and consequently the majority end up preparing their cases themselves. Those seeking refugee status often rely on international calls to gather the necessary documentation to show hardship, past persecution and country conditions. ***Please vote to pass S1771/A4576***!

1. \*This fact sheet was prepared by Karina Wilkinson from materials of the New Jersey Phone Justice campaign, a coalition that includes the American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey, LatinoJustice PRLDEF, the New Jersey Advocates for Immigrant Detainees, the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, and the New York University (NYU) School of Law Immigrant Rights Clinic (IRC). The views expressed by IRC are not necessarily those of NYU or its affiliates. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Hudson County provides international phone service through phone cards sold by GTL. Some detainees have reported lower rates for calls to certain countries. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Delaney Hall has an “initial charge” of 25 cents and an “additional charge per additional minute” of 25 cents. We assume the initial charge to refer to the first minute of calling. Community Education Centers receives 37% on each call. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)