



## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL 972

### AN ACT CONCERNING THE COST OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

I submit this testimony on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, New England's largest children's rights non-profit legal organization. The Center provides holistic representation for poor children in Connecticut through individual representation, training, education, and systemic advocacy. The Center represents children in a variety of matters, including child welfare, immigration, juvenile delinquency, public health, and special education. I am a staff attorney at the Center where I represent youth in criminal cases, many of whom desperately wish to keep in contact with their families.

**I am writing today to urge you to support Raised Bill 972. This bill is critical in ensuring successful re-entry and reduced recidivism for Connecticut's most vulnerable youth.**

Reductions in recidivism is a policy priority of the Connecticut legislature, and something that increases the safety of all Connecticut residents. In interviews with our youth clients at Manson Youth Institution and other Connecticut correctional facilities, youth said the high cost of phone calls is hurting their ability to engage with their families and to plan for their successful reentry into the community. This is because regular family engagement helps families to encourage their children to engage with prison treatment programs and to plan for reentry.<sup>1</sup> This in turns helps prison officials see better results from existing reentry programs.<sup>2</sup>

The reentry process is complicated and involves, among many other things, preparing for enrollment in school; thinking about and planning for where to live after release; collecting documents needed for identification, employment, and school enrollment; and preparing for medication management and other mental health services. Without regular phone

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, *Roadmap to Reentry*, (last visited March, 22, 2021), available at <https://www.justice.gov/archives/reentry/file/844356/download>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

contact with family, youth cannot plan for these things successfully. As a result, their first days and weeks of reentry are often chaotic, leading to unnecessary stress, panic, and idle time. This in turn leads to increased criminal thinking and increased recidivism.<sup>3</sup>

While youth detention rates have declined significantly in Connecticut, Connecticut has always incarcerated a disproportionate number of youth of color. From 2015 to 2019, the share of youth of color admitted to juvenile detention increased from 79 to 84 percent.<sup>4</sup> This shows that the cost of a prison phone call in Connecticut is a burden that disproportionately affects Connecticut youth and families of color. The fact that Connecticut receives revenue from these phone calls is an example of a harmful policy that disadvantages marginalized communities, communities who often have a harder time visiting Connecticut prisons in person. With this bill, the Legislature would take a step to protect our most vulnerable communities.

A recent study shows that Connecticut currently ranks 49<sup>th</sup> in the nation for the cost of a 15-minute prison phone call.<sup>5</sup> In 2019, New York City made prison phone calls free for all inmates. Massachusetts, Vermont, and New Hampshire have reduced costs for a 15-minute phone call to \$1.50, \$1.04, and \$.20 respectively, compared to Connecticut's current cost of \$4.87 plus fees. Among other states, New York, New Jersey and Rhode Island have taken steps to prohibit revenue kickbacks. With this bill, Connecticut would align with our neighboring states and in doing so would increase family engagement and reduce recidivism, something that is beneficial to the health and safety of all Connecticut residents.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/

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<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> Colette Marcellin and Samantha Harvell, Justice Policy Center, *Data Snapshot of Youth Incarceration in Connecticut 2020 Update*, (May 2020), available at [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102176/data-snapshot-of-youth-incarceration-in-connecticut\\_1.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102176/data-snapshot-of-youth-incarceration-in-connecticut_1.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Prison Phone Justice, *Connecticut Prison Phone Rates and Kickbacks*, (last visited March 22, 2021), <https://www.prisonphonejustice.org/state/CT/>.