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Prison Telecommunications Policy Changes

In this report, we examine state efforts to reduce the costs associated with incarcerated individuals maintaining contact with their families.

Since the 1980's, the US incarcerated population has grown from 315 thousand to 1.8 million as of 2022.[1] As Bardelli et al. explain, with this growth political pressure for austerity has led states to shift some of the costs of incarceration to incarcerated individuals.[2] As part of this move, states have contracted with private companies to provide dining, healthcare, commissary (packaged food, hygiene products, electronics), telecommunications, and media services. Bardelli et al. document that in 2018 New York spent $757 per individual on commissary while each inmate averaged $3,718 in total spending, with a significant portion of that going towards phone calls. New York prison wages were $0.40 per hour, meaning many had to rely on outside support to meet their needs.[3] Researchers have found that high commissary and phone costs along with other fees can lead to further economic struggle after release from prison due to factors including loss of vehicles, loss of licenses, and increased interest levies that make successful reintegration more difficult.[4] Disproportionate rates of conviction for poor Americans mean most incarcerated individuals are at a higher risk of these outcomes. In a Brookings Institute study on work before and after incarceration, researchers found that, prior to their incarceration, 56% of previously incarcerated individuals sampled earned less than $500 a year

[1] Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Correctional Populations in the United States, 2022 – Statistical Table*, May 2024. https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/correctional-populations-united-states-2022-statistical-tables.
[2] Tommaso Bardelli, Zach Gillespie, and Thuy Linh Tu, "Surviving austerity: Commissary stores, inequality and punishment in the contemporary American prison," *Punishment and Society,* Vol. 23 (2023): 955-976.
[3] Bardelli et al., "Surviving austerity: Commissary stores, inequality and punishment in the contemporary American prison."
[4] Bardelli et al., "Surviving austerity: Commissary stores, inequality and punishment in the contemporary American prison;" Zachary Fuchs, "Behind Bars: The Urgency and Simplicity of Prison Phone Reform," *Harvard Law & Policy Review*, Vol. 14 no. 1 (Summer 2019): 205-230; Veronica Horowitz, Kimberly Spencer-Suarez, Ryan Larson, Robert Stewart, Frank Edwards, Emmi Obara, and Christopher Uggen, "Dual Debtors: Child Support and Criminal Legal Financial Barriers," *Social Service Review*, Vol. 96 no. 2 (June 2022); 226-267; Chin Jou, "Paying the Price for Privatization: Prison Food in the Era of Mass Incarceration," *American Quarterly,* Vol. 74 no. 2 (June 2022): 395-417; Mary Katzenstein and Maureen Waller, "Taxing the Poor: Incarceration, Poverty Governance, and the Seizure of Family Resources," *Perspectives in Politics,* Vol. 13 (September 2013): 638-656.

and 30% earned between $500 and $15,000 with an average of $12,780 for those that were working.[5]

Research on the Effects of Maintaining Contact with Family

Researchers have found that increased visitation and family communications with incarcerated individuals is correlated with reductions of recidivism, better mental health, and higher rates of positive parent-child relationships.[6] The Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) measured a 13% reduction of recidivism between 2003 and 2007 for those that were visited versus those that were not.[7] In a 2014 meta-analysis of women reentering society, researchers concluded that maintaining regular contact with family members reduced and delayed recidivism.[8] The researchers also found that telephone contact with family had the greatest impact on this reduction. Other researchers have found that loss of social contact increases rates of depression and strains relationships including increasing the difficulty of parents maintaining connection with children.[9] Incarcerated parents were more likely to report positive relationships with their children when there was consistent parent-child contact, with telephone calls being the most effective means of making that contact more frequent.[10] In 2016, the U.S. Department of Justice reported that 47% of state and 57% of federal prisoners had at least one minor child totaling 1.5 million people age 17 or younger that had an incarcerated parent.[11]

Telecommunications Policy Changes

Federal Policy Changes

In 2015, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) implemented the first major attempts by the federal government to reduce costs for incarcerated individuals when it set phone call rate

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[5] Adam Looney and Nicholas Turner, "Work and opportunity before and after incarceration," *The Brookings Institute*, March 2018. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/es_20180314_looneyincarceration_final.pdf.

[6] Kelle Barrick, Pamela K. Lattimore, and Christy A. Visher, "Reentering Women: The Impact of Social Ties on Long-Term Recidivism," *The Prison Journal*, Vol. 94 (2014): 279-304; Sydney Ingel and Hayley Carlisle, "THREE: Pay to talk: the financial barriers, consequences, and solutions to prison and jail communication*,"* in *Agenda for Social Justice 3: Solutions for 2024,* ed. Kristen M. Budd, Heather Dillaway, David C. Lane, Glenn W. Muschert, Manjusha Nair, and Jason A. Smith (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2024), 19-25; Shanghe Jiang and L. Thomas Winfree Jr., "Social Support, Gender, and Inmate Adjustment to Prison Life," *The Prison Journal,* Volume 86 no. 1, (March 2006): 32-55; Julie Poehlmann, "Incarcerated Mothers' Contact with Children, Perceived Family Relationships, and Depressive Symptoms," *Journal of Family Psychology,* Vol 19, no. 3 (2005): 350-357; Julie Poehlmann, "Representations of Attachment Relationships in Children of Incarcerated Mothers," *Child Development*, Vol. 76 (2005): 679-696.

[7] Minnesota Department of Corrections, *The Effects of Prison Visitation on Offender Recidivism*, November 2011. https://mn.gov/doc/assets/11-11MNPrisonVisitationStudy_tcm1089-272781.pdf.

[8] Kelle Barrick et al., "Reentering Women: The Impact of Social Ties on Long-Term Recidivism."

[9] Sydney Ingel and Hayley Carlisle, "*THREE: Pay to talk: the financial barriers, consequences, and solutions to prison and jail communication."*

[10] Julie Poehlmann, "Representations of Attachment Relationships in Children of Incarcerated Mothers."

[11] Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Survey of Prison Incarcerated individuals, 2016: Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children,* May 2021. https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/pptmcspi16st.pdf .

caps and barred many add-on fees lowering some pricing by 50%.[12] After the passage of the Martha Wright-Reed Act in 2023, which removed statutory limitations preventing the Commission from setting lower rates, the FCC announced further reductions of 50-66%, with the lowest cap at $0.06 per minute. This was scheduled to go into effect in 2025 but has since been modified with higher caps and delayed until April 1, 2027.[13]

State Legislative Policy Changes

At the time of this report, five state legislatures have acted to reduce costs placed on incarcerated individuals by passing bills to make prison phone calls free.

California: In January 2022 the California legislature passed Senate Bill 1008, making calls free for all incarcerated people in state penitentiaries and juvenile facilities starting January 1, 2023.[14] Telecommunications as defined by the 2022 bill includes phone calls, electronic messages, and video calling.[15] While phone calls are the only service that is provided at no cost to incarcerated people, the bill classified all of prison telecommunications as a public utility. This gave the California Public Utilities Commission the authority to establish service quality standards for all prison telecommunications.[16]

Senate Bill 1008 built on a 2021 agreement that the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation had with the telecommunications provider Viapath,[17] which allowed for one 15-minute cost-free phone call for incarcerated individuals every two weeks.[18] This agreement cost taxpayers $214,000 in December of 2021.[19] To fully implement no cost telecommunications in all of California state penitentiaries, the state set aside $32 million dollars for fiscal year (FY)

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[12] Federal Communications Commission, *FCC Takes Next Big Steps in Reducing Inmate Calling Rates,* October 2015. https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-335984A1.pdf.

[13] Federal Communications Commission, *Incarcerated People's Communications Services; Implementation of the Martha Wright-Reed Act; Rates for Interstate Inmate Calling Services,* October 7, 2025, https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-415061A1.pdf.

[14] Becker, Josh. "Governor Signs SB 1008 (Becker), the 'Keep Families Connected Act,' Following Grassroots Push from Community Members and Senator Josh Becker." Press release, September 30, 2022. Senator Josh Becker. https://sd13.senate.ca.gov/news/press-release/september-30-2022/governor-signs-sb-1008-becker-the-keep-families-connected-act.

[15] An act to add Section 2084.5 to the Penal Code, to add Section 2899 to the Public Utilities Code, and to add Section 208.1 to the Welfare and Institutions Code, relating to corrections California. SB 1008. *Chapter 827, Statutes of 2022*. Approved by Governor September 29, 2022 https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220SB1008.

[16] California Public Utilities Commission. "Assigned Commissioner's Ruling Amending Phase II Scope and Schedule and Directing Testimony," Rulemaking 20-10-002. May 20, 2022. https://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Efile/G000/M478/K075/478075894.PDF.

[17] Formerly known as Global Tel Link ViaPath Technologies. "GTL Becomes ViaPath Technologies, Launches Expanded Reintegration Services." Press release, January 4, 2022. https://web.connectnetwork.com/gtl-becomes-viapath-technologies/.

[18] California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. "California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Announces Reduced Cost of Telephone Calls for Incarcerated Population." News release, March 1, 2021. https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/news/2021/03/01/california-department-of-corrections-and-rehabilitation-announces-reduced-cost-of-telephone-calls-for-incarcerated-population/.

[19] Office of Financial Management, "Prison Communication Cost: A Comparative Market Analysis of U.S. States' Prisons," Western Washington University, February 2025, https://cbe.wwu.edu/sites/cbe.wwu.edu/files/2025-02/OFM%20Prison%20Communication%20Cost.

2023 and FY 2024 and $36 million for FY 2025.[20] This amounted to 0.017% of total state expenditures for FY 2025.[21] The increased cost was to reflect the increased phone usage among the incarcerated population, as the daily call volume rose from 1.4 million minutes in December 2022 to 3.5 million minutes by June 2023.[22]

Connecticut: In October 2022 Connecticut made access to telecommunications free for prisoners and juveniles in detention centers with the signing of Senate Bill 972.[23] Telecommunications as defined by the 2021 bill included "voice communication, video communication and electronic mail services."[24] Prior to this law, 15-minute calls cost $3.65.[25] The 2021 bill was projected to cost the state $4.5 million to $5.5 million per year.[26] For FY 2025 and 2026, the Connecticut DOC set aside $9.5 million for free telecommunications, $6 million to cover phone calls and $3.5 million for electronic messaging, totaling $4.75 million for the state to subsidize telecommunications annually.[27] This amounted to 0.0198% of the total state expenditures for FY 2026.[28]

Increased phone calling accessibility to incarcerated individuals in Connecticut coincided with a surge in telecommunication frequency. The frequency of calls rose from 700 thousand per month in December 2022 to 1.1 million by June 2023.[29] The rise in usage did not affect the cost for phone call usage as Connecticut pays a flat monthly fee per incarcerated person with telecom provider Securus Technologies.[30] They do have a per message contract with telecom provider

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[20] Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Subcommittee No. 5. *Outcomes: May 2, 2024*. Sacramento, CA: California State Senate, 2024. https://sbud.senate.ca.gov/system/files/2024-05/sub5_05.02.2024_outcomes.pdf.
[21] California Department of Finance. "California State Budget – 2024-25 Budget Summary." State of California. 2024. https://ebudget.ca.gov/2024-25/pdf/Enacted/BudgetSummary/FullBudgetSummary.pdf. The figure was calculated by the authors by dividing the cost of the program by the total general appropriation for the state's fiscal year.
[22] Office of Financial Management, "Prison Communication Cost: A Comparative Market Analysis of U.S. States' Prisons," Western Washington University, February 2025.
[23] Connecticut Legislature, Senate *An Act Concerning Communication Services In Correctional And Juvenile Detention Facilities*, S.B. 972 June 1, 2021 https://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/act/Pa/pdf/2021PA-00054-R00SB-00972-PA.PDF.
[24] Connecticut General Assembly, Senate *An Act Concerning Communication Services in Correctional and Juvenile Detention Facilities*, (1) S.B. 972 June 1, 2021
[25] Human Rights Watch, "Connecticut Poised to Provide Free Calls to Prisoners," April 11, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/11/connecticut-poised-provide-free-calls-prisoners.
[26] Connecticut General Assembly, Senate *An Act Concerning the Cost of Telecommunications Services in Correctional Facilities,* S.B. 972, 2021 https://www.cga.ct.gov/2021/FN/PDF/2021SB-00972-R000453-FN.PDF.
[27] Connecticut. Office of Fiscal Analysis. *Judicial and Corrections Subcommittee Budget Sheets Agency Hearing Phase FY 25*, 2024. https://www.cga.ct.gov/ofa/Documents/year/GOVBS/2024GOVBS-20240208_Judicial%20and%20Corrections%20Subcommittee%20Budget%20Sheets%20Agency%20Hearing%20Phase%20FY%2025.pdf .
[28] Connecticut General Assembly. *An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2027*. Public Act 25-1. Enacted June 2025. Office of Policy and Management. https://portal.ct.gov/opm/bud-budgets/fy2026-fy2027-biennium-governors-budget/fy2026-fy2027-biennium-governors-budget . This figure was calculated by our team.
[29] Office of Financial Management, "Prison Communication Cost: A Comparative Market Analysis of U.S. States' Prisons," Western Washington University, February 2025.
[30] Connecticut General Assembly, State Senate Judicial and Corrections Subcommittee, "CA and Amendments2.5," last modified March 13, 2025, https://www.cga.ct.gov/app/related/20250226_2025%20Subcommittee%20Documents/20250313_Judicial%20and%20Corrections/17PSX0027%20CA%20and%20Amendments_2.5.25.pdf .

JPay, a subsidiary of Securus, for emails and text messages which has led to a rise in costs with the increased frequency. Governor Ned Lamont cut the free text and email portion of the 2021 Bill for FY 2027, a projected reduction of $1.75 million per year.[31]

Colorado: In September 2023, Colorado began phasing in state coverage of prison costs under H.B 23-1133.[32] Prior to the bill, incarcerated people were responsible for 100% of the cost of phone calls.[33] The DOC covered 25% of costs FY 2024, rising to 35% in July 2024, with the law requiring 100% state coverage by July 2025.[34] The Colorado General Assembly has since changed the amount the department is required to cover, beginning July 1, 2025, to 75% of all inmate telephone call costs. The act now requires the department to cover 100% of all inmate telephone call costs on and after July 1, 2026.[35]

After the bill was implemented, the DOC saw a significant increase in phone call usage by incarcerated people. In FY 2024, when cost sharing began, average call minutes per inmate increased nearly 60%.[36] Colorado's Joint Budget Committee Staff estimate that covering 100% of phone call costs will be $5.2 million per year.[37] This amounted to 0.0416% of the state's total expenditure for FY 2025.[38]

Massachusetts: In November of 2023 Governor Healey signed Chapter 64 of the Acts of 2023, making all prison telecommunications free beginning January 1, 2024.[39] It began as a bill introduced in the Senate but was ultimately incorporated into the Acts of 2023.[40] The Act was more expansive in its definition of which telecommunications were made free than in other states, as it made not only phone calls free but also video calling and e-messaging services.[41]

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[31] Office of Governor Ned Lamont, "Governor Lamont Signs Biennial State Budget for 2026 and 2027," press release, June 2025, https://portal.ct.gov/governor/news/press-releases/2025/06-2025/governor-lamont-signs-biennial-state-budget-for-2026-and-2027?language=en_US.

[32] General Assembly of the State of Colorado, *Concerning the Cost of Communications Services for Persons in Custody, And, In Connection Therewith, Making An Appropriation,* H.B 23-113, June 7, 2023, https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/10Bc5L7DRrSYletDJLV71gYe-7RAXtg7q.

[33] Department of Corrections, *Department Priority: S-06, BA-04 Containing Inmate Call Cost Growth,* January 2, 2025, https://docs.google.com/document/d/1n4g73cDy-CRa9PD9KW5mZeZu3INhmXxCUKtX8Gimsp8/edit?tab=t.0.

[34] Department of Corrections, *Department Priority: S-06, BA-04 Containing Inmate Call Cost Growth.*

[35] General Assembly of the State of Colorado, *Concerning the Amount that the Department of Corrections Covers for Penal Communications Services, and, in Connection therewith, Making an Appropriation,* S 25-208, April 25, 2025, https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/2025a_208_signed.pdf.

[36] Department of Corrections, *Department Priority: S-06, BA-04 Containing Inmate Call Cost Growth.*

[37] Legislative Council Staff of the State of Colorado, DOC *Inmate Phone Costs*, SB 25-208, March 31, 2025, https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2025A/bills/fn/2025a_sb208_00.pdf.

[38] Colorado General Assembly, *Concerning the Provision for Payment of the Expenses of the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial Departments of the State of Colorado, and of Its Agencies and Institutions, for and during the Fiscal Year Beginning July 1, 2024, Except as Otherwise Noted* (Long Appropriations Bill), HB 24-1430, 74 Gen. Assemb., Second Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2024), https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb24-1430. The percentage was calculated by our team.

[39] *An Act Providing for Unlimited Free Phone Calls to Incarcerated Individuals*, chap. 64, Acts of 2023 (Mass.), accessed October 6, 2025, https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2023/Chapter64.

[40] Massachusetts General Court, *An Act to Keep Families Connected*, S.1494, 193 Gen. Ct. (2023–2024), accessed October 8, 2025, https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/SD1441.

[41] Commonwealth of Massachusetts, "Section 50: No Cost Calls 1," *Summary FY24 Budget* (2023), https://budget.digital.mass.gov/summary/fy24/outside-section/section-50-no-cost-calls-1/.

There is also no set cap on the time incarcerated individuals may use the phones. Prior to the law, fifteen-minute call cost incarcerated individuals between $2.40 and $2.80 depending on the county.[42]

To pay for the proposal, the state set up a state trust to fund the program, with $20 million to pay for the FY 2024.[43] This expenditure accounted for 0.056% of the FY 2024 budget.[44] The money was allocated to pay the provider for telecommunications, Securus Technologies, at a rate of $0.0799 per minute for phone usage.[45] The increase in phone accessibility has coincided with an increase in the number of calls made.[46] In November of 2023, incarcerated individuals spent 400 thousand minutes a month using the provided phones, and by October 2024 that number was up to one million minutes a month.[47] As a result of this increase in demand, Governor Healey requested $35 million in funding for the program for FY 2025; the legislature allocated $10 million.[48]

Minnesota: On May 17, 2023, Minnesota's Governor Walz signed S.F. 2909, the Judiciary and Public Safety Budget bill, into law. Beginning July 1, 2023, this bill allocated $3.1 million per year to eliminate the cost of phone calls for incarcerated persons.[49] Prior to the passage of S.F. 2909, phone services ranged from $1.50 to $7.50 for a 15-minute call costing $0.15 to $0.50 per minute depending on service provider and not including additional fees. Video calling using JPay was $9.95 for 30 minutes.[50] In total, Minnesota's incarcerated population was paying $4.5

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[42] Sarah Betancourt, "Massachusetts becomes fifth state in nation to make prison calls free," WGBH, November 17, 2023, https://www.wgbh.org/news/local/2023-11-17/massachusetts-becomes-fifth-state-in-nation-to-make-prison-calls-free.

[43] Commonwealth of Massachusetts, "1595-6153 No Cost Calls Trust Fund Transfer," *Summary FY23 Budget*, last modified July 2022, accessed October 8, 2025, https://budget.digital.mass.gov/summary/fy23/enacted/administration-and-finance/administration-and-finance/15956153.

[44] Commonwealth of Massachusetts. "View the Fiscal Year 2024 Budget." Mass.gov. https://www.mass.gov/how-to/view-the-fiscal-year-2024-budget.

[45] Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security and Securus Technologies, "Tenth Amendment to the Contract for Secure Inmate Calling System and Related Services," effective December 1, 2023, 3, https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/mass_contracts/ma_doc_amendment10.pdf.

[46] Office of Financial Management, "Prison Communication Cost: A Comparative Market Analysis of U.S. States' Prisons," Western Washington University, February 2025.

[47] Betancourt, Sarah. "Massachusetts Prison and Jail Calls Doubled in First Year of Free Calls." GBH News, December 4, 2024.

[48] Massachusetts Executive Office for Administration and Finance, "1595-6153: No Cost Calls Trust Fund Transfer," *Summary FY25 Budget*, accessed October 9, 2025, https://budget.digital.mass.gov/summary/fy25/enacted/administration-and-finance/administration-and-finance/15956153/.

[49] Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Minnesota Department of Corrections Helps Strengthen Incarcerated Persons' Support Networks with Free Phone Calls*, July 3, 2023, https://mn.gov/doc/about/news/news-releases/?id=1089-583445.

[50] Minnesota Office of the Ombuds for Corrections, *The Cost of Connection,* September 2023, https://mn.gov/obfc/assets/Ombuds%20for%20Corrections%20Cost%20of%20Connection%20Report%20_Final_%20%209.20.23_tcm1157-592620.pdf .

million per year to ViaPath (previously Global Tel Link), the contracted corporation providing these services.[51]

In FY 2024, the Minnesota DOC paid Viapath an average of $434 per incarcerated individual totaling $3.607 million, or 0.095% of state expenditures, at a rate of $0.04 per minute for intrastate and interstate calls and $0.17 for international.[52] The DOC estimates this will decrease by 60% if the FCC's 2024 rate cap changes go into effect in 2027.[53] An increase in calling volume accompanying these changes led to Minnesota adding a rule in May 2025 requiring a 15-minute wait period before making another call so others could use the phone.[54]

ICSolutions Overview

The Vermont DOC has transitioned its communication contract from ViaPath to ICSolutions (ICS) starting February 2025 in a contract that will last until February 2029.[55] The contract is estimated at $100,000.[56] The services provided support approximately 1,400 incarcerated individuals statewide, housed in six correctional facilities.[57] ICS is a direct subsidiary of Keefe Group, LLC, which is a subsidiary of TKC Holdings, Inc.[58] The Vermont DOC has contracted with ICS to provide calling and account billing services to incarcerated individuals.[59] Phone calls are made using the ICS debit account. Funds added to the Keefe Trust commissary account can be transferred to the Debit account.[60] Under the current contract, in-state calls cost $0.028 per minute, interstate calls $0.06 per minute, international calls $0.06 per minute. Remote video visitation costs $0.16 per minute, streaming tablet content costs $0.05 per minute, email/text

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[51] Celina Chapin, "Testimony in Opposition to HF 2812 as a part of HF 2432 to Remove Free Communication to People Incarcerated in Minnesota Prisons and Their Families," *Minnesota House of Representatives*, April 3, 2025, https://www.house.mn.gov/comm/docs/iKT8brvkd0erJHO444ZA-g.pdf.

[52] Calculated using call cost and inmate population data from: Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Performance Report,* 2024, https://mn.gov/doc/assets/2024%20DOC%20Performance%20Report%20Final%20Accessible_tcm1089-665169.pdf.
And state budget data from: Minnesota Management and Budget. *Budget and Economic Forecast*, February 2025. https://mn.gov/mmb-stat/000/az/forecast/2025/budget-and-economic-forecast/february.pdf.

[53] Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Performance Report,* 2024, https://mn.gov/doc/assets/2024%20DOC%20Performance%20Report%20Final%20Accessible_tcm1089-665169.pdf.

[54] Minnesota Department of Corrections, *Phone* Calls, accessed October 11, 2025, https://mn.gov/doc/family-visitor/contact-and-general-information/phone-calls/

[55] State of Vermont, *Contract Summary and Certification: Contract #49226,* February 9, 2024, https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2026/Workgroups/House%20Corrections%20and%20Institutions/Bills/H.294/Witness%20Documents/H.294~Kristin%20Calver~Keefe%20Commissary%20Contract~4-17-2025.pdf .

[56] State of Vermont, *Contract Summary and Certification #49243,* February 9, 2024, https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2026/Workgroups/House%20Corrections%20and%20Institutions/Bills/H.294/Witness%20Documents/H.294~Kristin%20Calver~Inmate%20Calling%20Solutions%20Contract~4-17-2025.pdf .

[57] State of Vermont, *Contract Summary and Certification #49243,* February 9, 2024

[58] Federal Communications Commission, *Application Filed For The Transfer of Control of Inmate Calling Solutions, Llc D/b/a Icsolutions To Securus Technologies, Inc.,* July 2, 2018, https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-18-684A1.pdf.

[59] ICS Corrections, Inc. *Vermont Department of Corrections*, 2025, https://icscorrections.com/facilities/vt_doc.html.

[60] ICS Corrections, Inc. *Vermont Department of Corrections,* 2025.

messaging $0.25 per message, and voice messaging $0.25 per message.[61] Calls are limited to a maximum of 15 minutes. There are blocks on types of phone numbers, temporary or permanent denial of phone usage rights, call monitoring/recording, and incarcerated individual voice validation.[62] The state receives a commission based on a percentage of the cost of the services provided. The commission rate is to be determined at the time of the execution of the contract.[65] The commission supports funding for the Department's recreational supplies and activities.[66]

Legal Challenges and Service Issues

Keefe Group, LLC has faced legal scrutiny regarding its business practices in correctional settings. In *Reichert v. Keefe Commissary Network*, *LLC* the plaintiffs allege that Keefe and its subsidiaries engaged in unfair and deceptive practices in connection with the management of incarcerated individual trust accounts and release debit cards.[63] Release debit cards are used to reimburse confiscated cash and funds placed in the commissary account as an individual is released from prison.[64] Many government facilities have opted to redistribute the funds via cash or check since release debit cards carry hefty fees.[65] Keefe settled for $11,000 to each plaintiff, and three times the fee incurred on their release plus $15. In *Watkins v. Rapid Financial Solutions, Inc*., *et al.* the plaintiff alleged the same complaint about release debit cards, resulting in a settlement of $815,000.[66] *Adams v. Benton County Sheriff* addressed concerns about the handling of inmate funds and contracts with private commissary vendors. This included allegations that country officials received kickbacks from Keefe in exchange for exclusive service agreements.[67] The county agreed to pay $71,609.58 into a settlement fund.[68]

TKC Holdings, Inc. subsidiaries have had been the focus of reports of service issues in several states. In June 2025, Oklahoma cancelled its food services contract with Trinity Service Group due to reported low quality and lack of nutritional deficiencies.[69] In 2024, incarcerated individuals in Wisconsin experienced glitches and call drops during the rollout of new

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[61] Department of Corrections, *Call Rates and Taxes,* September 30, 2025, https://doc.vermont.gov/information-inmate-families-and-friends#:~:text=Call%20Rates%20and%20Taxes,taxes%2C%20except%20for%20international%20calls.
[62] ICS Corrections, Inc. *Vermont Department of Corrections, 2025,* https://icscorrections.com/facilities/vt_doc.html.
[63] Reichert v. Keefe Commissary Network LLC, et al, Case No. 3:17-cv-05848-RBL, W.D. Wash., 2019, https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/washington/wawdce/3:2017cv05848/251606/87/.
[64] Reichert v. Keefe Commissary Network LLC, et al, Case No. 3:17-cv-05848-RBL, W.D. Wash., 2019
[65] Reichert v. Keefe Commissary Network LLC, et al, Case No. 3:17-cv-05848-RBL, W.D. Wash., 2019
[66] *Watkins v. Rapid Financial Solutions, Inc. d/b/a Access Freedom Cards; Axiom Bank N.A.; Keefe Commissary Network, LLC d/b/a Access Secure Release,* United States District Court for the District of Nevada Case No. 3:20-cv-00509-MMD-CSD, 2025, https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/642f23e5f54b794300ac12a6/6792ce28c104b8440cd13b02_dR3FGg3VSM3OgCxrMFaeW54KybH0M7RRKTcrRWHS5XQ.pdf .
[67] *Adams v. Benton County Sheriff,* U.S.D.C. (W.D. Ark.), Case No. 5:13-cv-05074-PKH, 2017, https://www.casemine.com/judgement/us/59c26c83add7b03cd760eb09 .
[68] *Adams v. Benton County Sheriff,* U.S.D.C. (W.D. Ark.), Case No. 5:13-cv-05074-PKH, 2017.
[69] Keaton Ross, "Oklahoma's prison food contract canceled over nutritional deficiencies," *KOSU NPR,* July 7, 2025, https://www.kosu.org/local-news/2025-07-07/oklahomas-prison-food-contract-canceled-over-nutritional-deficiencies .

ICSolutions' tablets that prevented many from being able to connect with family for weeks and some for months.[70]

Conclusion

Based on the extant literature reviewed in the opening sections, the increase in calling volume and reduction in inmate spending seen after state policy changes has likely had positive impacts on these incarcerated populations in terms of rates of recidivism, financial burden, mental health, personal relationships, or reintegration. Regarding contracted service providers, given the history of ethical practice concerns and lawsuits throughout the industry and the limited alternatives available, experts suggest that efforts to increase transparency, oversight, and accountability would work towards reducing the risk of negative impacts on incarcerated individuals.[71]

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[70] Addie Costello, "'It's been a living hell': Wisconsin prison phone failures leave families disconnected," *Wisconsin Public Radio,* May 8, 2025, https://www.wpr.org/news/wisconsin-prison-phone-failures-families-disconnected.

[71] Gerald Gaes, "Current status of prison privatization research on American prisons and jails," *Criminology & Public Policy,* Vol 18, no. 2 (May 2019): 269-293; Alexes Harris, Tyler Smith, and Emmi Obara, "Justice "cost points" Examination of privatization within public systems of justice," *Criminology & Public Policy,* Vol 18, no. 2 (May 2019): 343-359; Steven Jackson, "Ex-Communication: Competition and Collusion in the U.S. Prison Telephone Industry," *Critical Studies in Media Communication,* Vol. 22 (October 2005): 263-280.