

Prison Telephone Charges

Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants is an international organization with an Iowa Chapter. We have members inside and outside Iowa's prison who advocate for a criminal justice system based on restorative justice and rehabilitation rather than punishment.

For several decades we have been working on the issue of excessive charges for prisoner phone calls. It is a well-documented fact that keeping prisoners in touch with their families plays a positive role in reducing recidivism. We also know that a disproportionate number of prisoners come from low income families whose financial burden is even greater due to having a loved one in prison.

The IDOC has long justified the high cost of inmate phone calls and the resulting annual phone commission revenue by pointing out that the revenue is used for worthwhile programs that benefit the incarcerated; however there is no way having families pay for these programs can be justified.

The Federal Communications Commission is conducting an on going investigation of inmate phone calls. They are highly critical of phone charges which are in excess of the cost of providing the service to the prisoners. They are recommending that charges be just, reasonable, and fair.

At the present time the IDOC is charging a flat rate of \$2.90 for all calls regardless of length. (other than international). This means that a call costs \$2.90 whether it lasts one minute or the maximum of 20 minutes. If your call is dropped you are still charged the full \$2.90. The FCC has recommended charges be per minute. (at or below 21 cents per minute)

Recently the Board of Corrections was asked to approve the annual "Offender Telephone Rebate Expenditures for FY 2016." The total amount of rebates for approval is \$523, 012. This will be spent for education, an apprentice program, and vocational training' as well as telephone administration and translation services. Why should prisoners and their families pay for these programs?

We recommend that the Iowa DOC adopt the revenue neutral system recommended by the FCC.

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