

Prison phone justice

Written by
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Nearly 15,000 children in Minnesota are losing contact with a mother or father in prison due to the extremely high cost of prison phone calls.

According to Dr. Artika Tyner of the Community Justice Project at the University of St. Thomas School of Law, the cost for one fifteen minute collect phone call from a prison can cost over \$17. Tyner said the high cost of these phone calls is not a product of the cost of service, but rather based upon the commissions received by prisons when they enter into service contracts with phone service providers. Tyner said the Community Justice Project along with many prison phone justice supporters are organizing to ban such commissions and cap the cost of prison phone calls.

Tyner said affordable prison phone calls strengthen familial bonds, reduce recidivism and support equal access to justice.

"Because many prisoners are incarcerated an average of 100 miles from their homes, phone calls are often the only feasible means for families to communicate," said Tyner in a statement. "For many families, the high cost of collect phone calls results in choosing between accepting the call and paying their living expenses for food and shelter. With over 15,000 children in

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Minnesota having an incarcerated parent, they are often the silent victims of this injustice."

Tyner said studies have shown these children are more likely to struggle in school and become socially withdrawn and furthermore, studies show that prisoners maintaining routine contact with family and close friends while incarcerated decreases recidivism and improves one's ability to reintegrate into the community.

According to phone justice advocates, the high cost of prison phone calls serves as a barrier for lawyers to remain in contact with their clients and directly limits an attorney's ability to provide effective representation.

The Community Justice Project is seeking change by requesting the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) to guarantee the new prison phone contract is based on the lowest cost of service and eliminate commissions. The group is calling on citizens to urge DOC Commissioner Tom Roy to ban the commissions and base the contract on the lowest overall calling cost. The Community Justice Project wants people to reach out to Roy by email (tom.roy@state.mn.us), sending a letter to Minnesota Department of Corrections (1450 Energy Park Drive, Suite 200, St. Paul, MN 55108) or by calling (651) 361-7226. The group is also asking people to sign its online petition at http://org2.salsalabs.com/o/6220/c/1313/p/dia/action3/common/public/index.sjs?action_KEY=16492