

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/families-of-prisoners-paying-more-to-stay-connected>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Rutgers University criminologist [Johnna Christian](#) has shown how families already pay high financial and social costs to maintain contact with their loved ones in prison.

Now, in a misguided response to tightening budgets, some states are adding to the costs families incur to stay connected despite [research showing the benefits of family support](#) when people return to the community from jail or prison.

Earlier this month, for example, [Arizona legislated](#) a building renewal fund for its corrections department, with money coming from new fees on visiting families. These include a onetime fee for conducting background checks on visitors 18 or older and a fee to put money in someone's prison commissary account.

Most corrections departments also generate funds through high collect phone call rates another cost to families. Admittedly, these fees vary widely by state. But [a recent survey of prison phone contracts](#) by [Prison Legal News](#) found states receiving an aggregate of \$152 million per year in phone commissions. Fortunately, at least some states Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Rhode Island, Michigan, South Carolina, California, and Missouri have thought better and banned these kickbacks.

States that are serious about improving reentry outcomes should follow this lead. Increasing the hurdles to staying in touch is penny-wise and pound-foolish.

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