

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/news/families-matter-prison-phone-calls-less-profit>

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Imagine that your child is hundreds of miles away and having to ignore their phone calls because you can't afford to pay the bill. Imagine not being able to wish your father or mother a happy birthday. Imagine not being able to give your condolences following the death of a cousin.

The rejection you subjected your loved one to would weigh heavy on you. You would carry the guilt with you for days, all the while knowing you'll be faced with the same decision soon enough.

This is the situation that thousands of Ohioans found themselves in until recently when Ohio prison officials announced a [renegotiated contract with Global Tel-Link](#).

A New Contract Means Relief for Families

Previously, phone services for Ohio's incarcerated people cost just over \$1 per minute, making a 15-minute call more than \$17. Under the old contract with Global Tel-Link, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) received \$15 million for doing business with the Virginia-based company, which has contracts with more than half of the states.

Read our blog [Gouging Prisoners and Families with Steep Fees Hurts Everyone](#).

Global Tel-Link got business, ODRC got a hefty kickback, and families of the incarcerated were left paying exorbitant phone bills—not exactly a winning proposition for families. Luckily, Ohio prison officials recognized the importance of affordable phone calls and renegotiated their contract. Under the new contract, calls will cost five cents per minute plus taxes.

Why Are Phone Calls So Important?

To put things in context, prison visitations are difficult for many because of travel costs and distance. Not only are people unable to see their family members, they're unable to hear from them either.

The average Ohio prisoner has a seventh-grade reading level, according to [ODRC](#). Eighty percent do not have a high school diploma. Additionally, approximately 30 percent of the males and 20 percent of the females are considered illiterate. This leaves phone calls as the only means of communications for many.

More importantly, about [56,000 Ohio children](#) have an incarcerated parent. Lack of contact erodes the parents' role in the child's life.

Why Should We Care?

The common-sense answer is backed by solid research.

It's critical for those who are incarcerated to communicate with their support network. [Forty years of studies](#) have found that those who maintain contact with family members and their community during their incarceration are less likely to return to prison.

Prisons for profit undermine rehabilitation and phone calls for profit undermine family unification and lower recidivism rates. Ohio's move to more affordable phone calls is not just a win for incarcerated people and their families, but also for taxpayers because lower recidivism rates mean smaller prison populations and fewer resources wasted on our addiction to mass incarceration.

Good for Ohio prison officials who chose the betterment of incarcerated people over a kickback from the for-profit prison phone company.

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