

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.acluohio.org/en/news/gouging-prisoners-and-families-steep-fees-hurts-everyone>

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When people go to prison, its often their loved ones who end up shouldering the financial burden.

Prison jobs can help inmates purchase the bare essentials, but it falls to families to transfer money into commissary accounts if they want to stay in touch with their loved one on a regular basis.

Of course, these commissary transfers have steep fees attached [up to \\$12.50 for a \\$200 online transaction](#). And once the money is in the account, using it to keep in touch is more expensive than you might think.

[Watch the ACLU of Ohios own Mike Brickner](#) discussing prison fees on WOSUs *All Sides with Ann Fisher*

In Ohio, [it costs up to 33 cents](#) to send one e-mail from prison. A Skype video chat costs \$10. Phone calls can be even more expensive, since the company that provides phone service [pays Ohio \\$15 million a year](#) to keep a monopoly on the system.

Until the FCC finally intervened in 2013, it cost \$17.14 for a 15-minute call from prison, [about a months pay](#) for a working inmate. Today it still costs 25 cents per minute to call a loved one, much higher than the national average.

Prison officials say they rely on these steep fees (and the huge commission they receive from service providers) to balance their ballooning prison budgets, but they are also contributing to a vicious cycle.

Connection with the outside world is one of the best predictors of whether prisoners will rehabilitate their lives and reintegrate into society after their release. The more contact they have with loved ones, the greater their chances to someday become a productive member of society.

Gouging these prisoners and their families at every turn may generate some short-term profit, but long term it only makes it more likely that they will stay in prison, or return after being released.

This is the fundamental flaw of mass incarceration. We fund our prisons using methods that make it harder for prisoners to be successful once they leave. As a result, more people come back to prison, budgets skyrocket, and we need even more money to fund the system.

The only way to solve our nations prison problem is to focus like a laser on keeping people out of jail in the first place and helping those who do end up behind bars get out and stay out for good.

Balancing our budgets on the backs of the poorest Ohioans accomplishes neither of these goals.

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