



2020 New York State YMCA Youth And Government

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Committee Assignment: Assembly Liberty 2

Bill #:AL-10

Sponsors: Alexis Ahn, Phoenix McBride, Heidi Becken

An Act To

Amend Article 22, section 623.2 of Correction Law to require the state to provide free domestic telephone service to individuals within the custody of the department of corrections.

The People of the State of New York, represented in the Senate and Assembly do enact as follows:

Purpose

To ensure that the earnings of prisoners and their potentially financially burdened families are not further diminished by unscrupulous and exorbitant phone call fees. This amendment additionally seeks to reduce recidivism rates, decrease the financial burden on the families of those incarcerated, and incentivize the reduction of costs associated with incarceration by policymakers.

Summary of Provisions

Section 1: Definitions

Commissioner: The Commissioner of Correction; the head of the Commission of Correction, the body tasked with providing for a safe, stable, and humane correctional system.

Prison: a secure facility operated by a state or the federal government that houses people who have been convicted of a felony criminal offence and are serving a sentence of (typically) 1 year or more.

Section 2:

§ 623.2 Telephone Fees.

~~2. The department shall make available either a "prepaid" or "collect call" system, or a combination thereof, for telephone service. Under the "prepaid" system, funds may be deposited into an account in order to pay for station to station calls, provided that nothing in this subdivision shall require the department to provide or administer a prepaid system. Under a "collect call" system, call recipients are billed for the cost of an accepted telephone call initiated by an inmate. Under such "collect call" system, the provider of inmate telephone service, as an additional means of payment, must permit the recipient of inmate calls to establish an account with such provider in order to deposit funds to pay for such collect calls in advance.~~



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To the extent that the department provides telephone services to inmates, the department shall provide all such telephone services to inmates without charge to the inmates or the receiving parties.

Justification

Free phone calls for inmates is not a new idea, as there has already been a precedent set within New York State; the New York City Council has recently passed a law, stating that New York City jail inmates would not be charged for their phone calls. In addition, legislation has been put forth by multiple states to achieve the same goal. These changes come in light of numerous studies, which have shown that more frequent contact with people outside of prison drastically reduces the rate of recidivism for inmates, and frequent contact with family members and loved ones is critical to reentry into society. In contrast, leaving jail/prison with little to no money undoubtedly increases the rate of recidivism, as inmates may find it difficult to sustain themselves upon reentry.

Fiscal Implications

Using the most costly situation in which every state prisoner makes a 30-minute phone call every day of the year, this bill would constitute about \$26 million annually, which would be added to the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision budget.

Environmental Implications

This bill has no environmental implications.

Effective Date

This bill will go into effect one year after passage.