

Roberta DiMezza

From: Antonya Jeffrey <ajeffrey@worthrises.org>
Sent: Tuesday, March 24, 2026 5:59 PM
To: Roberta DiMezza; House Judiciary Committee
Subject: Written Testimony for H8117
Attachments: 2026.03.24 - Worth Rises Testimony HB 8117.docx; 2026.02.23 - RI Fiscal Analysis FINAL.pdf; 2026 RI Campaign Fact Sheet.pdf

You don't often get email from ajeffrey@worthrises.org. [Learn why this is important](#)

Good Afternoon -- I'm writing to submit testimony in favor of H8117. I've also signed up for oral testimony.

Best,
Antonya

--

Antonya Jeffrey (*she/her*)

Director of Policy Campaigns and Government Affairs, Worth Rises

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**Testimony in Support of House Bill 8117 to Provide Free Communication
to People Incarcerated in Rhode Island and Their Families**

March 24, 2026

Dear: Chair McEntee, Vice Chairs and the House Judiciary Committee

My name is Antonya Jeffrey, and I am the Director of Policy Campaigns and Government Affairs at Worth Rises, a national non-profit dedicated to ending the exploitation of people impacted by incarceration. I submit this testimony in support of House Bill 8117 to make prison communication free for incarcerated people and their families in Rhode Island, and include a letter from the Connecting Families coalition, a state fact sheet on prison communication and a fiscal analysis of this legislation.

Thank you for taking the time to hear testimony in regards to this important legislation and thank you to Rep. Felix for sponsoring this legislation. We hope you will take particular note of the powerful stories of people who have been directly impacted by incarceration and how the exorbitant cost of prison communication has weighed on their lives. I will focus my testimony, instead, on the policy arguments and fiscal considerations that support this legislation.

Worth Rises strongly supports H8117, which would make communication in prisons free for incarcerated individuals and their loved ones. Worth Rises has helped jurisdictions across the country pass similar policies to provide free communications for incarcerated people and their support networks. We led the first successful state campaign in Connecticut and additional state campaigns in California, Colorado, Minnesota, and Massachusetts. We also led or supported successful local campaigns in New York City, San Francisco, San Diego, Los Angeles, and Miami. We are currently supporting similar campaigns in over a dozen state and local jurisdictions. Accordingly, we know what it takes to implement this policy and are committed to helping Rhode Island do so.

Rhode Island has the opportunity to join others on the forefront of this national movement to connect families with incarcerated loved ones and provide overdue relief to millions by simply making communication free. Today, we estimate that **Rhode Island families spend more than 1.1 million each year to speak to their incarcerated loved ones.** This money comes from the families — including grandparents, parents, spouses, siblings, children, and friends — of those incarcerated in Rhode Island. They are often forced to choose between paying for basic necessities like housing and food and paying to hear the voices of their incarcerated loved ones. In fact, one in three families with an incarcerated loved one goes into debt trying to stay connected, and 87% of those bearing this enormous financial burden are women.¹

However, family support can change how successful a person is both during and after their incarceration. It increases hope, reduces desperation, and encourages positive behavior, which in turn, reduces violence and improves the correctional environment for incarcerated people and correctional officers alike. One correctional administrator from Connecticut remarked about the policy and implementation there, “It’s not going to stop all the incidents, but it’s definitely curbing a lot of them. I understand that there has been some frustration among taxpayers about bearing the burden of the phone calls, but as someone who works inside the walls I can say that it is working and we do appreciate it.” And families have endless stories of how free calls have changed their lives.

Based on our prior work, **we estimate that providing free phone calls to incarcerated people and their loved ones will cost the state \$665,000 per year.** We base our estimate on known rates charged by leading vendors around the country, which in many cases are much lower than rates charged in Rhode Island, and usage rates in jurisdictions with free communication. Please note that there are always new compensation models rolling out that could further lower the cost.

The bottom line is that the cost of providing free prison communication pales in comparison to what families are currently paying as well as what the state spends on its correctional system and would return much more. Again, studies have consistently shown that communication between incarcerated people and their support networks increases hope inside, strengthens families, mitigates trauma for children facing parental incarceration, improves reentry success, and increases public safety.² Providing such communication at no cost would lift a critical burden off the shoulders of Rhode Island families, making these benefits more accessible.

¹ Criminal Justice Budget and Funding Opportunity Analysis. Public Sector Consultants, 2021.; See also, Program and Special Equipment Fund Revenues and Expenditures. Michigan Department of Corrections. https://www.michigan.gov/corrections/0,4551,7-119-1441_1513-519821--,00.html

² Wong, Leah. “Research roundup: The positive impacts of family contact for incarcerated people and their families.” Prison Policy Initiative, 2021. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/12/21/family_contact/

In closing, we ask that you vote yes on H8117. Thank you for your consideration, and please do not hesitate to reach out with questions at ajeffrey@worthrises.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Antonya J". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and a stylized "J" at the end.

Antonya Jeffrey
Director of Policy Campaigns and Government Affairs
Worth Rises



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February 23, 2026

Senator Meghan Kallman
93 Capwell Avenue
Pawtucket, RI 02860

Representative Leonela Felix
195 Carter Avenue
Pawtucket, RI 02861

RE: Fiscal impact of free communication for incarcerated people

Dear Senator Meghan Kallman and Representative Leonela Felix,

We, at Worth Rises, want to applaud you for introducing a bill which would connect families by making prison communication free. We are writing today to provide an expert analysis of the fiscal impact this policy would have on the current budget.

Worth Rises is a non-profit organization working to end the exploitation of incarcerated people and their loved ones. We are a leader in the prison phone justice space at the federal, state, and local level, and have helped pass and implement policies in Colorado, Connecticut, California, Minnesota, Massachusetts, New York City, San Francisco, San Diego, and Miami to make prison and jail phone calls free. We have built models based on the data we have gathered from prisons and jails across the country that allow us to support administrators and lawmakers with critical fiscal analyses.

Based on our analysis, we project that providing fully free communication across Rhode Island state prisons would cost the state \$665,000 annually, while saving Rhode Island families nearly \$1.0 million. Below please find our detailed fiscal analysis for this proposed policy, which we hope is helpful to you as you continue to advocate for phone justice for the tens of thousands of Rhode Island residents directly impacted by incarceration. Please feel free to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

Bianca Tylek
Executive Director

DATA & ASSUMPTIONS

Our findings are based on the following assumptions:

Population. For this analysis, we use the average daily population as of 2025, or 2,337, across the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (DOC).

Current spending. For this analysis, we estimate annual spending based on 2022 phone call, video call, and electronic messaging data as provided by the DOC.

Commissions. The DOC does not collect revenue from the sale of communications services.

PHONE CALLS

Incarcerated people and their loved ones are currently charged \$0.029 per minute for prison phone calls in Rhode Island.¹ However, for this analysis, we assume that DOC would renegotiate rates in line with other progressive states and counties that have prioritized affordability by assuming this cost directly. We also assume that DOC would be interested in exploring new innovative cost structures for providing communications services.

- **Option 1: Per minute model.** There are more competitive rates offered by all the leading prison telecom providers. For example, families pay a per minute rate of \$0.009 in Illinois, \$0.012 in New Hampshire, \$0.012 in Dallas, \$0.014 in Colorado, and \$0.020 in Ohio and Mississippi. Further, states with free calling programs pay a per minute rate of \$0.015 in New York and \$0.016 in California. For this analysis, we assume that if DOC continues with a per minute compensation structure, it would secure a rate of \$0.012 per minute.

Our elasticity model accounts for changes in call volume based on changes in rates. We use this model to account for the increase in volume expected when rates fall to zero as the proposed policy would require. Traditionally calling services are provided over wall phones. For this analysis, we use the average per person per day call time from all jurisdictions that have implemented free calling over phones to date, or 29.1 minutes. However, calling services are being increasingly provided using individual tablets. Thus, for this analysis, we use the average per person per day call time from all jurisdictions that have implemented free calling using tablets to date, or 44.9 minutes.

- **Option 2 – Per device model.** In recent years, corrections agencies have been exploring new compensation structures which better reflect modern day technology. Per device models allow agencies to have predictable monthly expenses, based on the number of phones or tablets in the

¹ We note that recently passed federal regulations prohibit prisons from passing through most security and surveillance costs to incarcerated people and their loved ones through rates. As such, while the current rate charged in Rhode Island is below the new federal rate caps, the cost of these services will still have to be removed, paid for directly by the state, and rates adjusted downward irrespective of the proposed legislation. We do not account for this shift in security and surveillance costs herein, though it would lower the fiscal impact.

facility, and not based on the variable number of call minutes. With a per device model, call volume does not affect the cost of the policy and thus it can better align with the intention to increase communication.

- ***Per phone.*** One of these innovative models was pioneered by the San Francisco Sheriff's Department and is based on a per phone line basis, whereby the agency pays a monthly fee per phone line. While the San Francisco Sheriff's Department pays \$89.78 per phone line per month, since it pioneered this model in 2021, new procurement processes have offered rates as low as \$40 per phone line per month, once commissions are excluded, to county jails. For this analysis, we base our estimate on 474 phones across all facilities, a figure provided by DOC, and a monthly per phone line rate of \$40.

Per tablet. Another compensation structure was recently explored by the Connecticut Department of Correction, which negotiated a per tablet model whereby the agency pays a monthly fee per tablet. The Connecticut Department of Correction pays \$30 per tablet per month for unlimited international and domestic calling on tablets. To date, Connecticut is the only state to adopt a per tablet model, and it did so without a competitive bidding process, as such we do not consider its rate to be competitive and do not include this model in our analysis.

VIDEO CALLS

Incarcerated people and their families are charged \$0.25 per minute for video calls in Rhode Island. There are more competitive rates offered by all the leading prison telecom providers. For example, in Arizona, families pay \$0.03 per minute and a provider offered Virginia a rate of \$0.10 per minute in recent bids. For this analysis, we assume that the DOC would secure a rate of \$0.03 per minute.

Historically, the average use of video calls has been 11.8 minutes per month according to data provided by the DOC. This is a high estimate that assumes every video call lasted the full allowable length of 20 minutes, which is unlikely. In 2023, Massachusetts began offering free video calls in all state prisons as required by law, similar to the legislation proposed here, and the average use of video calls was 39.3 minutes per person per month. Accordingly, for this analysis, we assume an average of 39.3 minutes per person per month.

Free alternatives. In recent years, corrections agencies have been exploring alternative methods of providing video calls that are more cost-efficient and better reflect the state of video calling in the free world. For example, agencies like the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections and Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services provide access to free video calls through Zoom and Microsoft Teams. While not incorporated in this analysis, we highly recommend considering these options for video calling for incarcerated people, which would have no cost at all.

ELECTRONIC MESSAGES

Incarcerated people and their families are charged as much as \$0.25 per stamp to send an electronic message in Rhode Island. Every electronic message requires a stamp, and message attachments, such as images or videos, require additional stamps, which can quickly drive up the cost of electronic messages. For this analysis, we assume that the DOC would renegotiate rates in line with other progressive states and counties that have prioritized affordability by assuming this cost directly. We also assume that the DOC would be interested in exploring new innovative cost structures for providing communications services.

- **Option 1 – Per message.** There are more competitive rates offered by all the leading prison telecom providers. For example, in Maine, all families receive 10 monthly electronic messages for free and can pay \$0.025 for each additional message. In California, families pay a per message rate of \$0.03 for all message types. For this analysis, we assume that if DOC continues with a per message structure, we assume it would secure a rate of \$0.03 per message.

According to data provided by the DOC, in 2023, 0.8 electronic messages were sent per person per day. When Connecticut made electronic messages free, incarcerated people sent and received on average a total of 6.0 messages per person per day. For this analysis, we assume an average of 6.0 messages per person per day.

- **Option 2 – Per person.** In recent years, corrections agencies have been exploring new compensation structures to provide communications services that better reflect modern day technology. For example, the Connecticut Department of Corrections negotiated a per tablet compensation structure to implement unlimited electronic messaging access on tablets. Connecticut pays \$15 per tablet per month for unlimited electronic messaging on tablets. To date, Connecticut is the only state to adopt a per tablet model, and it did so without a competitive bidding process, as such we do not consider its rate to be competitive and do not include this model in our analysis.

ANALYSIS

Making prison communications free would save Rhode Island families nearly \$1.0 million each year.

- **Rates.** Today, Rhode Island residents are paying \$0.029 per minute for phone calls, \$0.25 per minute for video calls, and \$0.25 per stamp for electronic messages. The proposed policy would make all prison communications free for incarcerated people and their families.
- **Service costs.** Rhode Island residents pay the state's prison telecom vendors \$902,000 to communicate with incarcerated loved ones in prison annually, before taxes and fees.
- **Taxes and other fees.** Families also pay an estimated \$88,000 annually in other government fees and taxes, including the Federal Universal Service Fund assessed on interstate calls.

The fiscal impact of free prison communications on the state budget would be between \$425,000 and \$665,000 annually.

- **Commissions.** Rhode Island does not collect commission on prison communications and thus there is no loss of revenue associated with this policy.
- **Phone calls.** The cost of providing free phone calls in Rhode Island prisons would be based on the compensation structure as follows:
 - \$236,000 for a per phone line compensation model,
 - \$308,000 for a per minute compensation model deployed over wallphones, or
 - \$476,000 for a per minute compensation model deployed over individualized tablets.
- **Video Calls.** The cost of providing free video calls in Rhode Island prisons would be \$36,000 for a per minute compensation model.
- **Electronic messaging.** The cost of providing free electronic messaging in Rhode Island prisons would be \$153,000 for a per message compensation model.

CONNECT RHODE ISLAND FAMILIES WITH S2984 & H8117



Sponsors:
Sen. Kallman
Rep. Felix

WHAT WILL S2984 & H8117 DO?

- Allow Rhode Island residents to communicate with their incarcerated loved ones in state prisons and youth detention facilities at no cost
- Ensure access by establishing either a minimum 10:1 ratio of incarcerated people to operable phones, with at least two phones indoors
- Prohibits the state from collecting kickbacks from its prison telecom vendor
- Protects in-person visitation

"I haven't called in years now. Families are unnecessarily strapped. We are forced to go into debt just to maintain connection to our family members inside. And we couldn't do it anymore."

— Mother of two whose husband is incarcerated

\$1.0M



\$665k

Annual spending by families on communication

RIDOC charges \$0.029 per minute to speak with an incarcerated loved one, or \$0.59 for a 20-minute phone call. A 20-minute video call costs \$5.00.

Annual cost of making communication free

Providing free communication in prisons is cost-effective program that promotes rehabilitation and becoming increasingly so with innovative models being pioneered across the nation.

SUPPORT CONNECTING FAMILIES BECAUSE...

- **1 in 3 families with an incarcerated loved one goes into debt** trying to pay predatory prison telecom vendors to maintain contact and 87% of the financial burden is borne by women.
- Every child deserves to hear "I love you" from their parent. Communication **mitigates the trauma suffered by the 1 in 28 children whose parents are incarcerated.**
- Communication with loved ones disrupts the toxicity of prisons and creates hope. When supported, incarcerated people are more committed to their own success and engaged in rehabilitative behaviors, which studies have shown **decreases incidents in facilities and reduces recidivism, making officers and us all safer.**
- **No program is more accessible and effective at improving reentry success** than communication that strengthens relationships between incarcerated people and their support networks.
- The positive social and fiscal benefits associated with communication significantly outweigh its costs.

VOTE YES ON S2984 & H8117!