



## The RI **FREEDOM** Collective

### TESTIMONY IN **SUPPORT** OF H8117 - RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT-CORRECTIONAL DEPARTMENT - COMMUNICATION SERVICES

March 23, 2026

Dear Chairperson McEntee and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

Rhode Island Freedom Collective is writing to express strong support for H8117 to provide free communication services, scheduled for hearing March 24th. This policy is not only humane-it is practical, fiscally responsible and aligned with a growing national movement to strengthen families and improve public safety.

For many incarcerated individuals, a simple phone call is the only way to maintain meaningful contact with their children, partners, and support networks. These connections are not luxuries; they are essential to rehabilitation. Decades of research show that people who maintain strong family ties while incarcerated are significantly more likely to succeed upon release. When communication is free, we remove a financial barrier that has long fallen hardest on low-income families, especially women who often shoulder the cost of staying in touch with loved ones behind bars.

Regular access to phones significantly reduces stress inside correctional facilities by allowing incarcerated individuals to maintain healthy connections with their families and support networks. When people can communicate freely and predictably, tensions decrease, emotional stability improves, and conflicts are less likely to escalate. This calmer environment directly benefits staff as well, creating safer housing units where interactions are more constructive and less volatile. In short, reliable communication isn't just a convenience — it's a proven tool for improving overall safety and well-being throughout the facility.

Importantly, this reform is part of a broader national trend. States and cities across the country- including Connecticut, California, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Colorado, and several major municipalities- have already enacted laws making prison and jail phone calls free.

We urge you to support this critical reform and to ensure that free communication services become a permanent part of our correctional system.

Thank you for your attention and for your commitment to building a more just and effective system.

Sincerely, Rhode Island Freedom Collective

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