



# RHODE ISLAND BROTHERHOOD OF CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS

*"Representing Those Who Work the Toughest Beat in the State"*

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March 24, 2026

Chairman and Members  
House Judiciary Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
Providence, Rhode Island

Re: Opposition to House Bill 8117 – Prisoner Telephone Use / Free Communication Services

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Rhode Island Brotherhood of Correctional Officers, I write to express our strong opposition to House Bill 8117.

While maintaining communication between incarcerated individuals and their families is important, this legislation goes far beyond that goal and creates serious public safety, operational, and financial consequences that cannot be ignored.

### **This Is Not Theoretical - It Is Already Happening**

We do not need to speculate about the impact of unlimited, free inmate communication.

Recent reporting out of Massachusetts at the Bristol County House of Corrections shows a clear and troubling trend following the implementation of free and unlimited phone calls:

- A 50 percent increase in criminal charges against inmates at the Bristol County House of Corrections
- Nearly 35 new criminal charges this year alone
- 18 assault charges and 13 drug-related charges already filed

According to investigators, these increases are directly tied to expanded communication access.

Inmates are:

- Coordinating the introduction of drugs into facilities
- Engaging in witness intimidation and restraining order violations
- Using shared PINs to evade monitoring systems

As one investigator stated, inmates are actively using communication systems to organize criminal activity from inside the facility.

## **Increased Violence and Drug Activity**

Massachusetts officials have reported:

- Rising inmate-on-inmate assaults
- Increased assaults on staff
- Significant growth in drug trafficking, including synthetic drugs such as K2

These are not isolated issues, they are direct consequences of expanded, unregulated communication access.

## **Unfunded Burden on Taxpayers**

This bill eliminates any cost structure and prohibits the Department from receiving revenue to offset expenses.

In Massachusetts, similar programs now cost taxpayers approximately \$1.5 million annually.

That cost does not include:

- Increased staffing for monitoring
- Investigative resources
- Security enhancements

This bill does not eliminate costs, it shifts them entirely onto taxpayers.

## **Operational Strain on Staff**

Unlimited, free communication dramatically increases usage.

That means:

- More calls to monitor
- More investigations to conduct
- More pressure on already stretched staff

Facilities are already dealing with staffing challenges. This bill adds significant workload without adding resources.

## **Unlimited Access Without Control Is Unsafe**

Even supporters of the program in Massachusetts have acknowledged:

“Unlimited is unreasonable.”

Without limits, safeguards, and proper controls, communication systems become tools for:

- Coordinating criminal activity
- Circumventing monitoring systems
- Expanding illicit operations inside facilities

This bill removes cost controls, increases criminal activity, strains staff, and shifts the financial burden to taxpayers, all while ignoring clear warning signs from other states.

We are not opposed to communication. We are opposed to a system that expands access without limits, without safeguards, and without accountability.

For these reasons, the Rhode Island Brotherhood of Correctional Officers respectfully urges the Committee to reject House Bill 8117.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard Ferruccio". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R".

Richard Ferruccio  
President  
Rhode Island Brotherhood of Correctional Officers

# NBC 10 I-Team: Inmate crimes rise in Massachusetts following free, unlimited phone calls

by TAMARA SACHARCZYK, NBC 10 NEWS

Tue, December 3, 2024 at 6:00 PM

**Updated** Tue, December 3, 2024 at 6:29 PM

(WJAR) — A troubling trend is emerging from correctional facilities, as a growing number of inmates commit crimes behind bars.

Data obtained by the [NBC 10 I-Team](#) show nearly 35 criminal charges have been brought against inmates at the Bristol County House of Corrections this year, which is a roughly 50% increase from last year.

“There has been an increase in assaults,” Lt. Eric Cardoso said.

Cardosa works in the Special Investigations Unit at the Bristol County Sheriff's Office and has seen it firsthand.

“Within the last five years we have come close to 200 charges, and that ranges from inmate-on-inmate assaults, staff assaults, drug related cases, whether it's introduction or possession,” Cardoso said.

So far this year, inmates have faced 18 assault charges and 13 drug related charges.

Cardosa says pages of K2, or synthetic marijuana, are snuck into the prison through legal mail, then sold for upwards of \$4,000.

“They are being sold here for a good amount of money,” Cardoso said. “It's not visible to the naked eye, you have to really know what you're looking for.”

## FREE PHONE CALLS

Many of the drug crimes committed behind bars begin with communication on the outside, something made easier by a new state law in Massachusetts that allows inmates to make unlimited, free phone calls.

“One of the problems is that inmates now are engaging in more witness intimidation, as well as violating restraining orders, and then also just organizing crime, for example, trying to get drugs from the outside inside the jail,” Bristol County Sheriff Paul Heroux said.

Heroux supports the program that aims to reduce recidivism rates by keeping inmates connected with family and friends, but says it also comes with negative consequences.

“We are dealing with a population that has a history of committing crimes of different types, and so they are going to continue to do that while they’re in here,” Heroux said.

Inmates have even swapped access codes to make calls, making it harder for prison officials to trace.

“Guys that we normally flag as active as far as getting drugs into the facility try to bypass that and use somebody else’s pin, and that way it’s hard for investigators to pick up that they’re trying to do these transactions or coordinate these transactions,” Cardoso said.

## **COST ON TAXPAYERS**

The program is also pricey for taxpayers.

The prison system used to make money on inmate phone calls, now, the unlimited free calls cost about \$1.5 million a year.

“It’s all taxpayer money,” Heroux said.

Heroux believes that limiting phone calls in some way would cut down on costs and crime. "Unlimited is unreasonable," Heroux said.

In recent months, the prison has stepped up efforts to cut back on crime, including hiring new analysts to listen in on phone calls and read text messages.

Staff and visitors are also checked more thoroughly when entering the prison.

"We also have a canine officer with dogs that can smell a lot of the different types of drugs as they are entering, so that's something that's also being done differently," Heroux said. "It's just a more robust and involved effort to try and keep the drugs out of the jail."

While inmate crime is up this year, numbers were also high in 2019 and 2021.

Back in 2019, 23 drug charges were filed against inmates at the Bristol County House of Corrections.

Charges hit a five year high in 2021, with 24 assault and battery charges, 14 drug charges, three vandalism charges, and three charges involving lewdness.