EXHIBIT 3

Updates re: Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking:
Video Visitation

Video visitation editorials and news articles

PRISON
POLICY INITIATIVE

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Breaking news at statesman.com

WE SAY COUNTY JAIL SYSTEMS

Make in-person jail visits an option

For many inmates in county jails awaiting trial, the days are long, lonely and stressful. For them, visiting with family is their only connection to the outside world. It is a connection that deserves as much protection as the right to private counsel. It is an act that needs to be safeguarded by those operating the jails.

And yet, the trend to do away with in-person visitation in order to make money for local county lock-ups has become all too popular. It is a movement that gives this board pause. It is a trend that needs to cease in Central Texas.

Many county jail inmates have not been convicted of a crime and do not have the resources to make bail before trial. While some who enter these local jails only stay a few days or weeks, many remain behind bars for months at a time. While inmates wait to appear before a judge, these individuals deserve to communicate with loved ones. Their families should not have to carry the burden of high fees intended as revenue for the county.

Last year the Travis County Jail completely did away with in-person inmate visitation. Instead, it now uses a video visitation system similar to Skype provided by Dallas-based Securus Technologies that costs families $1 a minute to communicate with an inmate. That financial burden, we remind leaders, unfairly affects the largest population of incarcerated: the poor.

This week, Bastrop County Jail followed with a similar system.

We ask both Travis and Bastrop county officials to reestablish face-to-face visitation in their jails. Reliance on the video system alone is more problematic than helpful.

Just last month, inmate advocates in Austin called on sheriff's officials to restore in-person visitation at Travis County jails, saying the video chatting system is costly for prisoners and their families and has not improved security as promoted. The advocates pointed to a recent study by the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition and Grassroots Leadership that showed overall increase in disciplinary infractions, assaults and contraband between May 2012 and April 2014 in the county jail. Advocates say the results indicate conditions have worsened for prisoners. The findings are contrary to what the sheriff's office said would happen when it introduced the video system in May 2013. At the time, the sheriff's office said the new system would be safer for inmates.

Last year the Travis County Jail did away with in-person inmate visitation and now uses a video visitation system similar to Skype that burdens families with costs. This week, the Bastrop County Jail followed with a similar system. LAURA SKELDING / AMERICAN-STATESMAN

If the safety of inmates is not enough, other advocates also are concerned about the possibility that attorney-client conversations are being illegally recorded. In April, Securus and the top law enforcement agencies in Travis County were sued over reported recorded conversations between defense lawyers and inmates, communications protected under the Constitution. Advocates say the recordings were turned over to prosecutors.

Travis and Bastrop counties would do better if they instead emulate Dallas County's jail visitation system, which this week added video to available options which include pay phone and face-to-face visitation. Earlier this fall, Dallas commissioners rejected a plan that would have ended face-to-face visitation. Adopting a similar hybrid system in Travis and Bastrop counties would respect the rights of inmates and still produce revenue for the county.

In Travis County, the jail keeps 23 percent, or $4.60 of every 20 minute, $20 conversation logged using the video system. Bastrop's jail will get a 20 percent cut of their deal. Each system stands to make a lot of money for both counties. With their phone visitation alone, Dallas County reportedly received $2.8 million in commissions through their contract with Securus. Travis County was unable to provide totals for the revenue it has received from the agreement.

In-person visitation has a public benefit. A 2011 Minnesota Department of Corrections study shows that visits from family and clergy reduce recidivism. These visits "can significantly improve the transition offenders make from the institution to the community." A single visit can lower the risk of a person to re-offend by 13 percent. When visitations are reduced or eliminated, recidivism increases, according to study.

Benefits to public and inmate safety, supports for fragile families and adherence to the Constitution are all important parts of the corrections equation. Travis and Bastrop counties should correct that balance.