

I am the fiancée of an inmate currently serving year 10 of a 13-year prison sentence within the Michigan Department of Corrections. In June 2011, MDOC adopted a new contract with Global Tel Link/PCS that raised the phone call rates from \$1.50 a (15 minute) call to \$3.20 a (15 minute) call. There were many concerns regarding this new contract, specifically addressing the kickback/commissions that Global Tel Link/PCS would receive, and the additional monies collected by MDOC. Supposedly the additional funds collected by MDOC were to be used in the next four years to purchase cell phone detection equipment. Yet the MI chapter of CURE (Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants) was recently told by Russ Marlan, Executive Bureau Administrator for the Michigan Department of Corrections, that a portion of the approximately \$35 million in additional funds that will result from this new contract will go toward equipment such as ballistic vests, tasers, perimeter lighting & camera equipment, software and other items.

For much of the time since the new contract, I had been working full time. However, I have been unemployed for the past four months. I cannot tell you how unbelievably frustrating it is to pay these outrageously high rates, knowing that the additional money generated by this new contract is simply going toward MDOC operating costs and equipment budgets. That's not even counting the money that went to Global Tel Link as a commission, which equates to around \$12-16 million total. This increase in phone costs to provide additional budget money for "equipment" sounds like a standard slush fund to me. As I'm here struggling to pay my bills and make ends meet, my meager income is going to help provide Michigan DOC correctional officers with software and ballistic vests. (Can someone please explain why officers at a state prison would need \$800,000 worth of ballistic vests?) I don't understand this at all.

I want you to recognize that most of the loved ones who talk to these men in prison are wives, girlfriends and mothers – many of whom are single parents supporting the children of these inmates. In a day and age where a person can talk for unlimited minutes anywhere across the country for \$40-70 a month, it's ludicrous to expect one of the lowest demographics in our country/state to fork over almost \$.22 a minute to talk to their loved one who is only a few hours away. Understandably there would be a bit of a higher rate, due to special monitoring and recording devices needed on the line. Yet I can't understand how businesses can offer call monitoring and recording at a fraction of what our prison systems can.

We were told that immediately after the new contract, Global Tel/PCS would upgrade all of the phone equipment and provide additional phones to inmates to prevent wait lines and back-ups. In my fiancé's unit, one new phone was installed, and one was repaired, providing three working phones. The quality hasn't improved much. On a regular basis, our calls might have static, or get dropped, or become muted on one end of the conversation. We did not see any drastic changes or improvements in the phone technology or equipment as promised.

Before sitting down to compose this letter, I spent some time going back to the Global Tel/PCS website to view the amount of money I've spent funding phone calls since this new contract came into existence. I was horrified when I added up the costs. Since June 2011, **I have spent \$5,755 to pay for phone minutes to talk to my loved one.** That's in a period of only 18 months!!!! This is all documented via the Global Tel Link/PCS Daily Dial website.

Some might insist that I talked to my fiancé far too much. But I want to stress here that those phone calls only amount to about 1500 minutes a month (about 25 hours, or on average about 45 minutes a day). Even with the priciest of cell phone providers, a person can get unlimited nationwide calling for about \$70 a month. And yet here I'm calling my fiancé in a prison in the same state, and I'm paying about \$320 a month. I want you to pause and look at that for a moment. That's higher than most car payments!!

I want to also stress here that the figure of \$5,755 does not account for the \$3.95 fee that's required every time I load more funds into our account. Since I got paid every other week, the minimal amount of reloads I would do in a month was 2. (There were several times when, for trips or other emergencies, I added on additional funds). That's another \$150 or so just in fees to simply reload our account!

So here we're looking at close to \$6,000 just to be able to talk to my fiancé for 45 minutes a day. When I've tried to fight this issue and/or the phone rates, the pushback I received is that I shouldn't be talking to him that much, and that "it's a prison, not a hotel or summer camp." Or that "contact with the outside world should be an occasional privilege, not a right." I find these comments to be ignorant and completely unnecessary. My fiancé overcame a heroin addiction while in prison, and is now a clean, sober, reformed Christian. While serving his time in prison, he lost both of his cherished grandparents and was unable to attend their funerals. At this time, his father – a retired senior citizen – is aging and lives alone. I not only keep him abreast of family issues and concerns, but we also discuss a myriad of topics that I feel are helpful to his rehabilitation. Sometimes we pray together on the phone, or discuss our faith. Other times we talk about how life will be for him once he's paroled and living on the outside. We discuss his remorse over his crimes. We talk about prison stresses and violence, concerns with his inmates, books that he's reading, letters that he receives from old schoolmates, and of course, personal topics regarding work, finances, household issues and other concerns. And yes, at times we'll tell stories and joke or laugh.

It's this connection to me that helps him to keep a positive attitude throughout his days there. I help to encourage him, support him, guide him, and provide a sounding board for him to vent the frustrations of every day prison life. 45 minutes a day is not excessive when it comes to staying in contact and keeping a strong bond and connection to the outside world. It's important to me that my fiancé remains immersed in this world, rather than in the prison world. As long as he has his heart, eyes and ears to what's going on here at home, he'll continue to focus and strive for good behavior and continued correction so that he can come home and be a part of it. It means the world to him that I include him on major decision-making, and describe to him the events of my day. It breaks up the monotony of prison life, and gives him something to live and work for.

As you probably imagine, we're no longer talking for 45 minutes a day now that I'm unemployed. In fact, due to my current lack of income, we're in the middle of a 5 day stretch of no phone calls at all until I receive additional funds. This is so unbelievably hard on us. I know his spirits are down. It's tough enough to be in a northern Michigan prison in the winter, where depression sets in, snow drifts exceed 2 feet and the continuous grey skies and cold puts everyone on edge. It breaks my heart to know that he won't be able to hear my voice for another four days. Four days in prison when you've been in there for 10 years feels like an eternity, and each day gets longer and harder to bear. It frustrates me more than I can convey in this letter. Putting \$20 on our phone account (with a \$3.95 fee) doesn't last long at all – it's a mere 6 calls. Not even enough for one a week. I can't believe that even at \$80 a month, we can't have just one 15 minute call a day.

This has to end. If Michigan and every other state truly cares about reducing violence in prisons and having more successful parolees, it needs to stop treating the prison system like a profit-generating business where slush-fund monies can be siphoned off of hard working citizens under the guise of "slickly worded contracts." Our inmates are supposedly in a *correctional facility*, not a prison camp. Yet one of the most impactful ways to ensure correctional behavior is to keep them connected to their loved ones and the outside world. Why is MDOC making that so difficult? Because it pays well? We are being financially raped. It's a harsh, awful word to use, but when I look and see that I've spent almost \$6,000 just to talk to my fiancé on the phone, it's an accurate word to use. I would be so greatly indebted to the FCC if they could put an end to these horrific gouging practices. I urge you, on behalf of many other women who are just as frustrated and who aren't able to convey it in such lengthy terms, to please help us.