

Reasonable Calling Rates will Facilitate the Endurance of Mother-Child Relationships During the Period of a Mother's Incarceration

The proposal to ensure reasonable rates for inmate calling services will improve the welfare of female inmates and their children by allowing for increased parent-child communication.

Female prison population growth has far outpaced male growth in the past quarter-century. Judith Greene & Kevin Pranis, *HARD HIT: The Growth in the Imprisonment of Women, 1977-2004*, INSTITUTE ON WOMEN & CRIMINAL JUSTICE, <http://www.wpaonline.org/institute/hardhit/part1.htm>. Between 1977 and 2004, the number of women serving sentences of more than a year grew by 757%, in comparison to a 388% increase for males. The female incarcerated population as a whole has increased 2.2% since 2000, while the male population increased 1.6%. Leonard Sipes, *Statistics on Women Offenders*, CORRECTIONS.COM (Feb. 2012), <http://www.corrections.com/news/article/30166-statistics-on-women-offenders>. More than 70% of women in prison have children. Greene, *supra*.

Though always deleterious to parent-child relationships, the harmful consequences of imprisonment could be mitigated if efforts are undertaken to increase the feasibility of communication between mothers and children. Creasie Hairston, *Family Ties During Imprisonment: Important to Whom and For What*, 18 J. SOC. & SOC. WELFARE 87, 91 (1991). Lack of contact with children is one of the most demoralizing and depressing experiences of confinement for mothers, and being stripped of the mother role is one of the “most traumatic factors” in women’s adjustment to institutionalization. *Id.* at 94-95.

Children would also benefit from increased contact with their incarcerated mothers. Parental separation can cause delinquency and criminal behavior in children, as well as increase the likelihood that they become victimizers. Leslie Acoca & Myrna Raeder, *Severing Family Ties: The Plight of Nonviolent Female Offenders and Their Children*, 11 STAN. L. & POL’Y REV. 133, 136 (1999-2000). Furthermore, maintaining mother-child communication will help ensure a child does not lose *all* parental contact upon a mother’s imprisonment. While mothers typically care for the children of incarcerated fathers; with regards to female inmates, fathers seldom retain custody of their children. *See id.* at 135-136 (1991 federal inmate survey found that 92% of men but only 26% of women reported their minor children lived with the other parent). In addition, there is a higher likelihood that children of female offenders will be sent to foster homes in comparison to the children of male inmates. *See Acoca, supra*, at 136.

Reasonable interstate calling rates is the most feasible and cost-effective means of ensuring female inmates are able to maintain ties with their children. The majority of inmates are not visited. *See William Bales & Daniel Mears, Inmate Social Ties and the Transition to Society*, 45 J. RES. IN CRIME & DELINQ. 287, 304, 315 (2008). Distance to the prison from the child’s hometown, expense, and a poor relationship with the child’s caretaker are most often cited as reasons for infrequent visits. *See Hairston, supra*, at 92; Suzanne Choney, *FCC Prison Phone Rates Far Too High*, NBCNEWS.COM (Jan. 3, 2013), <http://www.nbcnews.com/technology/technolog/fcc-prison-phone-rates-far-too-high-1B7812867>. The deficit of prison programs facilitating contact between mothers and children, and the expense of implementing these, further supports the need for more reasonable calling rates as an avenue for communication. *See Acoca, supra*, at 138-139.