

Connecting Families

NEW YORK

In Support Of The Connecting Families Bill Package

Connecting Families is a coalition of directly impacted families and advocates in New York fighting to end the predatory cost of prison and jail communication and ensure that incarcerated people and their loved ones can communicate routinely and without barriers to access.

#ConnectFamiliesNY

We urge the passage of the Connecting Families ACT (S1942/A02164) and keep families connected by making phone calls and emails free in New York State prisons and county jails.

Communicating with loved ones is an essential human need. Yet, for people who are incarcerated in New York and their loved ones, the predatory costs of prison and jail phone calls makes connecting nearly impossible. These costs force incarcerated people and their families to choose between paying for basic necessities or staying connected. The financial impact of this choice is felt most acutely by economically distressed communities and communities of color. In fact, one in three families goes into debt just to hear the voice of a loved one.

The Connecting Families Act will help connect families by allowing incarcerated people to communicate with their loved ones at no cost.

Prison telecom corporations and jail administrators are exploiting families' human need to stay connected. In New York state prisons, incarcerated people and their families are charged 65 cents for a 15-minute phone call — or as much as seven hours of work for an incarcerated person. A simple electronic message costs 23 to 30 cents to send. In New York's jails, counties take an average 47 percent commission on calls, and a single 15-minute call can cost as much as \$10.42 with taxes and deposit fees tacked on top.

Communication costs trap incarcerated people and their families in a cycle of debt and poverty. Over 50 percent of families with an incarcerated loved one struggle to meet basic housing and food needs.^[3] Families often have to decide between basic essentials like groceries and communicating with an incarcerated loved one. One study revealed that one in three families with an incarcerated loved one goes into debt in order to stay connected, and 87 percent of those costs are carried by women.^[4]

The emotional and financial stress of limited and costly prison and jail communication is felt most acutely in Black and Latinx communities, which are disproportionately impacted by targeted racist over-policing, harsh sentencing guidelines, and mass criminalization. Over 75 percent of people incarcerated in New York's state prisons are Black and Latinx, despite Black and Latinx people making up less than 37 percent of the state's population.

For the families of the approximately 32,000 people incarcerated in state prisons and 15,000 people in local jails, this relief is urgently needed.^[5] Speaking with family and friends can not only provide relief from the debilitating isolation felt by people who are incarcerated, but can also set them up for success after release. New York can prioritize the mental wellbeing of incarcerated people, and alleviate the economic stress on their families by making prison and jail communication available at no cost.

Pass the Connecting Families Act!

[1] Families Left Behind: The Hidden Costs of Incarceration and Reentry, Urban Institute, 2005:

[2] Shanahan, Ryan and Sandra Villalobos Agudelo. "The Family and Recidivism." American Jails, 2012

[3] Id.

[4] de Vuono-Powell, Saneta et al. "Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families." Ella Baker Center, 2015

[5] NYS DOCCS Fact Sheet, June 1, 2020

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Organizations

#HALTsolitary Campaign

A Little Piece Of Light

Beacon Prison Action

BronxConnect

Brooklyn Community Bail Fund

Brooklyn Defender Services

Broome Tioga Green Party

CASES

Center for Community Alternatives

Center for Disability Rights

Center for Justice at Columbia University

Children of Promise, NYC

Children's Defense Fund-New York

Citizen Action

COFCCA

College & Community Fellowship

Color Of Change

Common Justice

Correctional Association of New York

Daughters4Justice

Exalt Youth

Exodus Transitional Community

Families, Fathers & Children, Inc.

Freedom Agenda

Getting Out and Staying Out

Graham Windham

Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison

Immigrant Defense Project

John Brown Lives!

John Jay College Institute for Justice and Opportunity

Justice and Unity for the Southern Tier

Justice for Families

Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice

Lawyers For Children

Mott Haven Reformed Church

Children's Haven: A Place of Healing & Hope

NAMI NYS

National Action Network - Buffalo Niagara

New Hour for Women & Children – Long Island

New York City Jericho movement

New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU)

New York County Defender Services

New York Immigration Coalition

New York State Defenders Association

Next100

Now we rise!

NY Community & Justice Alliance and Advocacy

NYU Family Defense Clinic

Office of the Appellate Defender

Parole Preparation Project

PEN America

Prison Families Anonymous

Project Attica: Community Through the Arts, Inc.

Release Aging People in Prison (RAPP) Campaign

Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) NYC

Speak Your Truth

The Bronx Defenders

The Center for Family Representation

The Legal Aid Society, Prisoners' Rights Project

The New York Initiative for Children of Incarcerated Parents

The New York Women's Foundation

The Osborne Association

United Voices of Cortland

WE GOT US NOW

Women & Justice Project

Women 4 Women

Workers Center of Central New York

Worth Rises

Youth Represent