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The Keeping Families Connected/No Cost Calls Coalition Celebrates Governor Healey and the MA State Legislature Putting Families Over Prison Profiteering

MASSACHUSETTS – Today, Governor Maura Healey signed a bill that establishes Massachusetts as the fifth state to make prison phone calls free statewide, and the first state to include provisions for free calls from county jails. This historic investment in the rights of incarcerated people – spearheaded in the State House by MA Sen. Cynthia Creem, MA Rep. Chynah Tyler, and MA Sen. Liz Miranda – will keep Massachusetts families connected without oppressive financial burdens. These reforms will be implemented December 1st of this year, and set a powerful precedent that we urge other states to follow. In response to this victory for civil rights, member organizations from [The Keeping Families Connected/No Cost Calls Coalition](#) released the following statements:

“It’s been an uphill battle to say the least, but one worth fighting for,” said **William “7even” Ragland, Chairman of the African American Coalition Committee (AACC)**, a coalition of men incarcerated at MCI-Norfolk focused on reforming the criminal legal system. “Black and brown people — many in poverty — make up 21% of the Massachusetts population but roughly 60% of its prison and jail population. It is a monstrosity and repugnant. It’s not surprising then that Black and brown people spend the most on phone calls, video calls, and e-messages with their incarcerated loved ones, to the tune of \$25 million annually. Given our low prison wages, our families are often left with the bill, deciding whether to put money on their loved ones’ phone accounts or pay their rent, put gas in their cars, or put food on their tables. This is all while prisons, jails, and their telecom vendors rake in profits. Today marks a change, and the AACC would like to thank everyone who was involved, and who worked on it every day like it was a Monday. We appreciate your benevolence.”

Jarelis Fonseca, directly impacted person and No Cost Calls Coalition member said: “It is with immense relief and gratitude that today marks the change families like mine desperately called to legislators to act on. As a directly impacted family and a No Cost Calls Coalition member I know the importance of access to phone calls and like so many who were affected by the financial burden. As a new reality sets in, my family can look forward to continued connection, unaffected and unlimited, possibilities with hope for a better future financially and holistically. I especially want to thank all the representatives who lead this way,



making a case continuously for the needs of families over systems profiteering. Thank you Governor Healey for going beyond hearing, believing in this reform, and prioritizing individuals and families. This fight has always been about people, defending them, uplifting them, and leading change that speaks for them in rooms they aren't in. We will continue to do that and celebrate this milestone in our continued history of victories standing up for our rights."

"As both a directly impacted person, and a member of the No Cost Calls Coalition, we want to express how relieved, excited and grateful we are for all the hard work that the legislature and Governor Healey has put into making phone calls free for our incarcerated loved ones," said **Joanna Levesque, whose significant other is incarcerated at Old Colony Correctional Center.** "Not only will this help relieve some of the financial burden that has been solely on me while I try to keep our housing afloat so my partner has somewhere stable and safe to come home to, it will also help us maintain healthy mental and emotional connections that are fundamental in reducing rates of recidivism and keep him strong and safe until he can be released."

Nia Reid-Patterson, directly impacted person and No Cost Calls Coalition Member, said: "My family and I have been advocating for this financial burden to be lifted from our lives for a little over six years now, it feels like a boulder has been lifted off my chest. Like many other families, making the choice between paying for calls to keep our families connected and groceries has been nothing short of cruelty from predatory prison phone companies profiting from our already vulnerable families. I appreciate the support, hard work, and advocacy of the legislators over the years, specifically Rep. Chynah Tyler, Sen. Cindy Creem, and Sen. Liz Miranda. They listened to our stories, they cared for us, they fought for us! Today I am grateful that Gov. Healey listened and uplifted the voices and struggles of some of the commonwealth's most financially vulnerable people. It's been a long journey; however, it's not over and we will continue to push for the proper implementation of this legislation so our families can be connected with maximum access."

"Thanks to the Massachusetts House and Senate, and Governor Healey for making no cost calls part of the state budget and passing it into law. The exploitation by private telecom corporations of the poorest families through the high costs of phone calls and other forms of communications has ended. Incarcerated people now will be able to speak to their children and other family members without fear of their families ending up in debt," said **Marlene Pollock, an Organizer from the Coalition for Social Justice Education Fund.** "Right now families are forced to choose between contact with their loved ones and paying important bills like rent and utilities. Having this connection will help people maintain their ties to society and eliminate this barrier to successful re-entry."



“This marks a milestone in the movement to end the abusive power of prison profiteering,” said **Michael Collins, Senior Director of State and Local Government Affairs at Color Of Change**. “Financial exploitation in our carceral systems has created barriers for families and their loved ones to stay connected, for the sake of gains by the state and corporations. The passage of this legislation in Massachusetts sets a national standard for human rights for incarcerated people, a standard we urge other states to follow. Color Of Change and our partners celebrate this win for civil rights and will continue to move forward a vision of a prison complex that puts first the humanity of incarcerated people.”

“Common Cause Massachusetts celebrates that the No Cost Calls measure has passed the legislature again after years of continued advocacy. Ensuring free phone calls in jails and prisons guarantees better access for people who wish to engage in their government, stay connected to their community, and become informed voters. We thank the House, Senate, and Governor for their leadership,” said **Dev Chatterjee, Program and Outreach Manager at Common Cause Massachusetts**.

“For too long, the poorest of the poor have been exploited through unconscionable phone rates so we applaud the passage of legislation addressing this injustice,” said **Pauline Quirion, Director of the CORI & Re-entry Project at GBLS** who worked on the legislation for over four years. “Phone calls are a lifeline for those who are incarcerated and studies show contact with loved ones leads to more success upon release from prison or jail. This is a great day for all the impacted individuals and families who worked so very hard to pass this bill and will finally get some badly needed financial relief.”

“We are thrilled that all people in prison and jail, including those detained for ICE, will now be able to stay in touch with their friends and families. Providing free communication is good family policy that redresses at least some of the racial, economic, and gender injustice of incarceration. Too many families, especially those headed by Black women and Latinas, have been shouldering the burden of overpriced calls to maintain relationships with loved ones. We look forward to the swift implementation of this important policy,” said **June Rowe and Rachel Roth, Members of Mystic Valley Action for Reproductive Justice**.

“For years, prison phone companies have profited off the backs of some of the most economically vulnerable families in Massachusetts,” said **Caroline Cohn, Equal Justice Works Fellow at the National Consumer Law Center**. “We commend Massachusetts for joining the growing list of states that no longer force their residents to choose between paying the rent or speaking with their incarcerated loved ones.”



"The MA legislature passed a law to provide critical financial support for incarcerated people and their families. Neighbor to Neighbor's member communities will see a direct positive impact from the ability to stay in touch with incarcerated loved ones, without the overwhelming financial burden previously placed on them by private telecom companies. When we eliminate barriers to connection, we ensure that our incarcerated brothers and sisters can remain in touch with their loved ones and reduce trauma on both sides of the wall," said **Bridget Kearney, a community member of Neighbor to Neighbor Massachusetts.**

"We are delighted to see the legislature recognize the importance of ending the predatory practice of charging incarcerated individuals and their loved ones exorbitant fees to stay connected. No family should have to choose between affording basic needs like rent or food and staying connected with loved ones. The victory for No Cost Calls is a win for families, a win for smoother re-entry, and a win for all people fighting for a more just commonwealth," said **Jonathan Cohn, Policy Director, Progressive Massachusetts.**

"After many years of struggle led by directly affected people, we are delighted to see this pass," said **Prisoners' Legal Services Senior Attorney Bonnie Tenneriello.** "PLS will do everything in our power to ensure that this legislation is implemented in a way that brings maximum access to vital communication between incarcerated people and their families."

"Unitarian Universalist Mass Action celebrates this new policy that will guarantee free communication to those who are in prisons, jails, and ICE detention in Massachusetts," said **Tali Smookler, Congregational Organizing Director at Unitarian Universalist Mass Action.** "As a UU group, our first principle is recognizing the inherent worth and dignity of every person. We uplift the work of all the organizers who have worked for years to make this a reality, and know that this will impact individuals, families, and our entire state for the better."

"Massachusetts is the third state just this year and the fifth state overall to make communication free for incarcerated people. It's so clear that the connecting families movement is picking up speed and taking hold. Legislatures across the country are recognizing the benefits of connecting incarcerated people with their support networks and just how simple and cost-effective it is to do," said **Bianca Tylek, Executive Director of Worth Rises.** "We applaud the Massachusetts legislature on the passage and signing of this bill that will make the promise of stronger families a reality, especially because it is the first state to make all prison and jail communication free. Thanks to the relentless work of families and allied advocates over many years, parents, children, siblings, and spouses on the outside will finally be able to reconnect with their loved ones inside."

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Members of the Keeping Families Connected/No Cost Calls Coalition include:

AACC (African American Coalition Committee), MCI-Norfolk
ACLU of Massachusetts
Actual Justice Task Team UCC
Ameelio
Arlington Fights Racism
Black and Pink Massachusetts
Boston Immigrant Justice Accompaniment Network
Boston Ward 4 Democratic Committee
Bristol County for Correctional Justice
Building Up People Not Prisons
Business Innovation Center
Central Massachusetts Jobs with Justice
Coalition for Effective Public Safety
Coalition for Social Justice
Color Of Change
Committee for Public Counsel Services
Committee of Interns and Residents SEIU
Common Cause Massachusetts
Community Action Agency of Somerville, Inc.
Community Reentry Program Inc.
Congregation B'nai Israel Tikkun Olam Committee
Decarcerate Western Massachusetts
Disability Law Center
Disability Policy Consortium
Embrace Boston
Families for Justice as Healing
First Parish Church Brookline
GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD)
Greater Boston Legal Services CORI & Re-entry Project
Haley House
Healing Our Land Inc. Ministry
Immigration Justice Task Force – First Parish Concord
Jane Doe Inc.
Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action
Jobs NOT Jails Coalition
Joint Coalition on Health



Justice For Housing, Inc.
Kavod Boston
MASC Massachusetts Against Solitary Confinement
Massachusetts Bail Fund
Massachusetts Bar Association
Massachusetts Chapter of the National Organization for Women
Massachusetts Coalition for Health Equity
Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women
Massachusetts Communities Action Network
Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition
Massachusetts Jobs with Justice
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee
Metro Boston Recovery Learning Community
Metrowest Worker Center – Casa
Muslim Justice League
Mystic Valley Action for Reproductive Justice
NASW-MA
National Consumer Law Center (on behalf of its low-income clients)
National Lawyers Guild-Massachusetts Chapter
National Lawyers Guild-Harvard Law School Chapter
New Beginnings Reentry Services
New England Innocence Project
New Vision Organization, Inc.
Northeast Justice Center
Out Now
Parole Review For All
Prison Policy Initiative
Prisoners' Assistance Project
Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts
Progressive Massachusetts
Sharon Interfaith Action
Sharon Racial Equity Alliance (SREA)
Showing Up for Racial Justice Boston
Showing Up for Racial Justice Worcester
SISTERS UNCHAINED INC
Southeast Recovery Learning Community
Temple Beth Elohim's Racial Justice Initiative
The F8 Foundation



The Real Cost of Prisons Project
THRIVE Communities of Massachusetts
Union of Minority Neighborhoods
Unitarian Universalist Mass Action
United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1445
UTEC
White & Associates, PC
Women & Incarceration Project, Suffolk University
Women's Bar Association
Worth Rises