

I. 2020 DRAFT JJPOC RECOMMENDATIONS IN BRIEF

Requirement

INCARCERATION WORK GROUP RECOMMENDATION 1	It is recommended that JJPOC: A. Support a bill in the General Assembly which reads, "Beginning July 1, 2020, telephone services or any other telecommunications services provided to a child confined in a correctional facility shall be provided free of charge. Beginning July 1, 2020, the JJPOC shall establish a committee to study phone call rates for all youth, 18-21 years of age, confined in Connecticut correctional facilities, and such committee shall make recommendations to the General Assembly and Department of Administrative Services prior to the renegotiation of the current prison phone services contract set to expire March 1, 2021."	
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BACKGROUND

For imprisoned children in a Connecticut correctional facility, regular contact with family helps support the child's reentry and reduces recidivism rates. This is because regular family engagement helps imprisoned children process previous criminal choices, cope with prison conditions, encourages children to more effectively engage with their prison treatment programs, and helps them plan for their reentry together with their families. Family engagement also allows prison officials to expand and see better results from existing reentry programs, a priority of the JJPOC. This proposed legislation will eliminate phone call costs and increase family engagement for imprisoned minors. It also helps the JJPOC align Connecticut law with surrounding states and national reentry best practices.

DATA

Connecticut ranks 49th in the nation for the cost of a fifteen minute phone call, and in interviews with youth at MYI and other Connecticut correctional facilities, youth said the high cost of phone calls was hurting their ability to engage with their families and plan for their reentry. Other jurisdictions have recognized this problem and taken steps. In 2019, New York City made prison phone calls free for all inmates. Massachusetts, Vermont, and New Hampshire have reduced costs for a fifteen minute phone call to \$1.50, \$1.04, and \$.20 respectively, compared to Connecticut's cost of \$4.87 plus fees. New York, New Jersey and Rhode Island have taken steps to prohibit revenue kickbacks to the state in vendor phone contracts, something the current Connecticut contract allows. Despite the negative policy implications for the state and the high costs for families, the annual cost of making phone calls free for children is modest (estimated \$50,000 - \$75,000).

POTENTIAL IMPACT

With this bill, the JJPOC would take steps to increase youth voice, family engagement, and reduce recidivism. It would increase youth voice without major policy changes and at a reasonable cost. In short, this bill would prohibit the state from charging children for phone calls, and would require the JJPOC to explore changes to any future phone services contract before the current contract expires with the vendor on March 1, 2021. The JJPOC would be supporting reentry for hundreds of Connecticut youth by adopting reentry best practices more in line with surrounding states. And for lawmakers who have had concerns with previous proposed legislation that reduced phone costs for all persons imprisoned in Connecticut, this bill limits the lost revenue by solely targeting minors and does so without breaking any current contracts.