

## CRITICAL CONNECTIONS

# The *Power of Free* Communication in Prisons and Jails

For decades, incarcerated people, their families, and allied advocates have decried the high cost of correctional communication services and its destructive impact on society as a whole. But, in recent years, the tide has turned, and campaigns to not just reduce the cost of communication, but make it entirely free to incarcerated people and their families, have been successful. Across the country, when jurisdictions made correctional communication free, something simple but profound happened: incarcerated people began talking to their loved ones more often, for longer, and in more meaningful ways.

Incarcerated people emerged from isolation and regained a sense of belonging that became an igniting force for self-improvement. Families, who are punished by proximity, experienced life-changing financial and emotional relief. Correctional staff entered markedly calmer and safer work environments. And the public welcomed home people who were more emotionally and logistically prepared to contribute positively to society.

*Critical Connections: The Power of Free Communication in Prisons and Jails* is the first systematic evaluation of the national policy campaign to make prison and jail communication free, which has now done so for 330,000 incarcerated people nationwide and their families. Analyzing data from six prison systems and more than a dozen local jails, the report shows that free communication fundamentally transforms individual rehabilitation, family stability, facility operations, and public safety.

Read the report at [ConnectFamiliesNow.com/PowerofFree](https://ConnectFamiliesNow.com/PowerofFree)

Six prisons systems have implemented free communication policies, including:

- Federal
- California
- Connecticut
- Massachusetts
- Minnesota
- New York

Dozens of local jails, from New York City to San Diego, have also implemented free communication policies.

“ That’s one thing about these phone calls that you don’t get in a letter — *you can hear the smile.* ”

— SHAWN, INCARCERATED PERSON (CONNECTICUT)

330,000

Incarcerated people, and their families, now have access to fully free phone calls, and in some cases other communication services

\$622 million

Saved by families – with 70% of prison savings and 82% of jail savings flowing to Black and brown families

6.4 billion

Additional minutes of connection between incarcerated people and their loved ones made over nearly 600 million more calls



# 8 Areas of Measurable Impact

## 1. INCREASED Connection

Removing the cost barrier produced an immediate and durable rise in connection. Daily minutes used per person rose meaningfully across the board.



## 2. FINANCIAL Relief

Free communication has saved families \$622 million, with savings in state systems ranging from \$172 to \$1,801 per incarcerated person per year. Families accrue another \$244 to \$2,927 per year from the value of new call time.

CONNECTICUT

**\$2,927**  
ADDITIONAL ACCRUED ANNUAL VALUE

**\$1,801**  
SAVED ANNUALLY PER INCARCERATED PERSON

## 3. STRONGER FAMILY AND Community Relationships

Conversations moved from brief, transactional agendas toward ongoing, relational connections — restoring the daily fabric of family and community life that incarceration had interrupted.

## 4. PARENTING AND Child Development

Incarcerated parents rebuilt steady, daily relationships with their children — helping with homework, advising on major life decisions, or just saying goodnight. These connections help mitigate against the intergenerational harm of parental incarceration.

## 5. IMPROVED MENTAL AND Physical Health

Free communication eased loneliness and depression for incarcerated people, restoring a sense of belonging and hope for the future. For their loved ones, connection relieved worry and mitigated loss. Free communication also helped incarcerated people communicate urgent medical needs that their loved ones could raise to the facility.

## 6. LESS VIOLENCE AND Operational Disruption

Correctional staff view free communication as a security tool, crediting it with reducing tensions, calming facilities, and making their jobs easier.

**100%**  
OF CORRECTIONAL STAFF RECOMMEND OTHER AGENCIES ADOPT FREE COMMUNICATION POLICIES

## 7. REHABILITATION

Sustained connection with loved ones reinforced the internal motivation behind personal growth, helping incarcerated people remain connected to who they are beyond their incarceration and reinforcing or expanding their rehabilitative efforts.

## 8. REENTRY PLANNING AND Success

Incarcerated people used free calls to coordinate housing, employment, education, and treatment before release, and to rebuild the family ties that make reentry stick — a way for taxpayers to see real public safety returns on their investment.

Ultimately, the results demonstrated that a well-designed free communication program in prisons and jails is not just achievable, but also a necessary component of any effective public safety strategy. When the cost barrier to communication is removed, families are strengthened, incarcerated people recommit to rehabilitation, correctional systems function more effectively, and people return to society sooner and better prepared for success. In other words, providing free communication in prisons and jails is an evidence-based policy that improves correctional outcomes.