

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND



Department of Corrections

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The Honorable Robert E. Craven Sr.
House Committee on Judiciary
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

April 3, 2025

Re: H5350 – Relating to State Affairs and Government-- Corrections Department

Dear Chairperson Craven:

This evening the House Judiciary Committee will consider House Bill #5350. This bill would repeal RIGL § 42-56-38.1 and require the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC) to provide free communication services to inmates and juveniles held in residential placement or detention centers. It would also require such facilities to provide in-person contact visits. While questions about the funding of this initiative remain, the Department supports the legislative intent of this bill and is hopeful the sponsors remain willing to address the concerns previously raised.

The language requiring RIDOC to provide “persons in their custody and confined in their facilities with in-person contact visits” is overly broad and does not consider the variety of security concerns that may preclude an incarcerated person from the privilege of such visit or necessitate a suspension of visits at a particular facility or systemwide. Health emergencies, violence, disciplinary history, public safety, and individuals under investigation are all circumstances in which in-person contact visits may not be permitted on a case-by-case basis. Visits are an important management tool used in consideration of the safety and security of the incarcerated population, staff, and approved visitors alike. Each facility warden determines the facility's visiting schedule including the day and time for visits, the location and length of visits, the number of weekly visits per inmate and the number of visitors an inmate may have at any one visit. Restrictions on visitation are a last resort and we remain committed to facilitating safe, in-person visitation. Eliminating the potential for this dangerous unintended consequence was discussed in previous years, and we remain thankful to the sponsors for working with the Department to alter the language in way that does not compromise the legislative intent of the bill while also addressing this safety concern.

Presently, the Department provides two free 20-minute phone calls per incarcerated individual per month and one free 20-minute video session per month per incarcerated individual, with both offered to the entire population. Additional funding will be necessary to achieve the mandates placed upon the Department to ensure free communication for the incarcerated population. As noted in previous written testimony, presently, telephone calls may be scheduled upon request. Calls may not exceed 20 minutes and cost incarcerated persons \$0.029 per minute for interstate and intrastate telephone calls, and \$0.41 per minute for international calls. Video calls cost \$4 per 20-minute session and \$5 per 30-minute session. In 2024, our vendor, Securus Technologies, collected just over \$666,000 from incarcerated persons for

The Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC) contributes to public safety by maintaining a balanced correctional system of institutional and community programs that provide a range of custodial options, supervision and rehabilitative services in order to facilitate successful offender reentry into the community upon release.

all calls and video visits. This accounts for a total of 2,028,200 calls made. Secured messaging through the utilization of tablets is also included in this legislation. It cost the incarcerated population nearly \$99,000 for messages sent during the 2024 calendar year. In some other states which have instituted free communication for the incarcerated, the number of calls and/or messages has nearly doubled. If this bill passed, expenses to the State of Rhode Island are likely to increase beyond that collected from incarcerated persons in calendar year 2024.

This legislation allows for RIDOC to supplement voice communication with other communication services, which would come at an additional cost. For example, in 2024, more than \$30,000 was spent by the incarcerated population on postage. It is also unclear if there would be any limit on the number of calls, video visits, and postage.

The Department continues to install telephones and other voice communications devices in each housing unit and other common areas of its facilities when possible. Though the physical plant in the housing units of some facilities makes it impossible to safely comply with the proposed ten to one ratio in this legislation, the Department does maintain at least two, often more, telephones in each housing unit. It is also worth noting that State law presently prohibits the State from imposing a surcharge for telephone use, meaning the monies collected go directly to the vendor.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Wayne T. Salisbury Jr.".

Wayne T. Salisbury Jr.
Director

cc: Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee
The Honorable Representatives Kazarian, Morales, Stewart, Kislak, and Potter
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House