



## **IOWA CITIZENS UNITED FOR THE REHABILITATION OF ERRANTS**

*An Effort to Reduce Crime Through Criminal Justice Reform - Spring 2018*

### **SPRING MEETING OF IOWA CURE**

The Spring meeting of Iowa CURE will be held on May 20 (Sunday) at 2 p.m. at Trinity Los Americus, 1548 8th St.. Our speaker will be Jerry Bartruff, Director of the Iowa Department of Corrections. Please come and bring questions you might have about the future of the IDOC and your concerns regarding such things as re-entry, budget cuts, programs available, visiting hours, etc. This is a very special opportunity to speak directly to the Director regarding your concerns and also to let him know of your appreciation of the work of the Department at a very difficult time when there are severe budget cuts.

### **JEAN BASINGER, PRESIDENT OF IOWA CURE TO RETIRE**

Jean Basinger, one of the founding members of Iowa CURE and longtime President of the board, has announced that she will be retiring as President and board member at the end of the year. Iowa CURE was founded as a part of the Criminal Justice Ministries organization when it was determined by leaders, the Rev. Robert Cook and the Rev. Doug Mayben that there was a need for a support group for families and friends of the incarcerated. Pattie McDonald was the first director. The group was started with a small grant from the Presbyterian Church. Besides Jean, a number of the current CURE members were members of the founding organizations.

Jean plans to continue to be an active CURE member, but will turn the leadership over to other members of the very capable CURE board. There is visioning committee working on plans for the future of the organization.

CURE is an International organization and Iowa CURE is active at all levels.

### **Iowa CURE BOARD MEMBER TO ATTEND INTERNATIONAL CURE MEETING IN RWANDA**

Carla Dawson, board member of Iowa CURE will attend the International meeting of CURE which will be held in Kigali, Rwanda from May 21-25. The conference will explore reconciliation, restorative justice practices, alternative to imprisonment and other issues in the criminal justice context while taking an up-close look at the Rwandan experience of post-genocide reconciliation, especially through the use of "Grass Courts." In addition the group will be sharing experiences and knowledge of recent advances and trends in the area of human rights and prison reform. In addition, they will visit a Rwandan prison, the genocide memorial in Kigali, and a village of reconciliation. This experience comes at a good time as our own prisons seem to be moving away from programs based on restorative justice and reconciliation and back toward revenge and punishment. Carla will be available to speak to groups when she returns.

If you would like to contribute toward Carla's travel expenses, you can send a check to:  
Iowa CURE,  
P.O. Box 41005, Des Moines, IA 50311, Make it out to Iowa CURE and put "Rwanda" in the "For" space.

### **NEW HOUSE BUILDING PROJECT PROPOSED AT NEWTON**

The Iowa Department of Corrections is proposing a new non-profit house building project modeled after the South Dakota Governor's House program. It would be built adjacent to the Newton Correctional Facility and Newton Reentry Center. Incarcerated persons from the two facilities enrolled in the apprenticeship programs would build 2 and 3 bedroom homes to be trucked to home sites. Those persons working there could become qualified for trades in the jobs in the construction industry. These include painter, electrician, plumber, HVAC installer, Carpenter, drywall applicator and finisher and building inspector.

Homes are targeted to income-qualified buyers and should not compete with existing home builders. Homeowners, non-profit organizations, or contractors will purchase the home through councils of government.

According to Dan Clark of IPI the following needs to happen: funding for capital investments and operating capital obtained; incorporate non-profit once funding is imminent, solidify sales, marketing structures with regional organization in Iowa; lay ground work for apprenticeship programs; make final decisions on home designs, finalize financial plans and forecasts.

This certainly sounds like a very exciting project.

### **IOWA SUPREME RULES AGAINST SHACKLING JUVENILES IN COURT**

The Iowa Supreme Court has adopted rules that prohibit the use of handcuffs, chains and other types of restraints for juveniles who appear in court unless they are approved by the judge in advance. Currently these decisions are made by the juvenile court officers. Chief Justice Cady says that there is enough flexibility in the ruling to deal with the possibility of juveniles fleeing or endangering others. Many of us have been in court or in the hallways in the court house and been troubled to see juveniles in chains.

The Iowa ACLU and other children rights groups pushed for the change. At least 28 states ban their use.

## **CHANGES IN PERSONNEL**

### **Hiring, Retiring, and Passing**

#### **IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS**

There have been many changes in personnel and appointments in the Iowa Department of Corrections during recent months. Nick Ludwick resigned from his position of Warden at ISP and returned to his home in Michigan. He had been struggling with cancer for a number of years. We received word that he died recently. Our sympathy goes to his family and friends.

#### **CENTRAL OFFICE:**

Fred Scaletta is no longer with the department. He served many years, most recently as Deputy Director, and Director of Public Relations. Cord Overton is now the Communications Director. Steve Dick is the Financial Manager. Sally Krammer, who has been with the department for many years, is Deputy Director of the Community Based Corrections has added responsibilities. Diane Wilder served the department as an ALJ, as the Warden at ICIW and then as a Regional Deputy Director of Prisons. Most recently she served as Inspector General of the department. She has now retired and the decision has been made to leave that position vacant for the time being. Lettie Prell came to the department first served as Assistant to the Warden under IDOC Director Gary Maynard and then became Research Director. She is best known for her work on risk assessments. She is also a science fiction writer. Beth Skinner, who was hired to oversee the Recidivism Reduction Grant is now the Risk Reduction Director and is taking over training, quality assurance, and research. Dr. Jerome Greenfield is the Health Care Administrator. Dan Duce, Deputy for Safety has retired and he will be replaced as this is an extremely important area of service.

#### **BOARD OF CORRECTIONS:**

Rich LaMure: Chairperson is from Anamosa and has worked in law enforcement for many years.  
John Chalstrom of Cherokee, is Superintendent of Schools in Cherokee.  
Rebecca Williams, Vice Chairperson, is from Cedar Rapids  
Dr. Mary Chapman was employed at Des Moines Area Community College for many years and is well known for assistant to students in need of assistance.  
Lisa Hill is school administrator from Johnston.  
Tom Phillips is a new addition to the board. He formerly served on the Parole Board.  
He has suggested that the Board of Corrections and the Board of Parole members have a joint meeting in the near future. He also suggested that the Director's report be more informative.

#### **BOARD OF PAROLE:**

Jeff Wright is the new Chairperson of the Board of Parole and has begun his work. He graduated from Drake Law School and had his own law practice for a number of years, specializing in criminal and family law. A number one concern is the need to fill vacancies on the support staff. We understand that this has been approved. The current members of the Board are Vice-Chairperson: Norm Granger, Sue Lerdal,, Chuck Larson Sr., Sheila Wilson and alternate

board members Jackie Rump, Gregory Crocker, and Susie Weinacht.

## **DRESS FOR SUCCESS**

Dress for Success is a Global Non-Profit Promoting Economic Independence of Disadvantage Women by Providing Professional Attire. Wow! That's a mouth full. Dress for Success provides much more than just giving women a nice basic wardrobe. They also provide a network of support and classes that teach work place etiquette, how to keep your life in balance, financial health, as well as leadership and civic responsibility.

When Sandra Smith, of the DOC staff, heard about this program she thought it would be a good partner for the DOC Central Office Intern Program. Several women from ICIW in the internship program work at Center Office and are enrolled in the Dress for Success program. They spoke at a recent BOC meeting and also modeled clothing they had received. They spoke of the confidence they had gained for this experience. Anyone who comes in contact with the women of the front desk each day can attest to the poise and self-confidence they show which will certainly serve them well in the future.

## **ICIW CHILDREN'S GARDEN**

Julie Stevens, an Assistant Professor in landscape, is leading students at ISU in creating a children's garden just outside the visiting room at Iowa Women's Correctional Facility. Professors from other departments are also contributing by helping the students understand the impact on everyone in the family when one of their members is incarcerated and the importance of maintaining the mother-child bond. Studies show that this type of opportunity is a way of reducing recidivism. A walking path is part of the design and is very popular to relieve stress.

Many creative methods were used to inspire the children to provide input into the design of the garden. In addition to the students, women incarcerated at the prison are also working to create the garden. Children and mothers report that when they are in the garden they forget they are in a prison. The incarcerated women and students also work well with security.

There are 20 students working on the project. They are undergraduates in their final semester. Incarcerated women participating in the project self-select.

Assistant professor Stevens and some of her students gave a presentation to the Board of Corrections at the March board meeting and it was well received. However, Board Chair Rich LaMure said that he questioned whether it was wise to have this available when it was so much better than what they have at home. "This is a prison."

It was asked how the project is being funded. It is being funded by donations. There is a GoFundMe page. No money from the general fund is being used.

## **IOWA COALITION 4 JUVENILE JUSTICE**

IOWA COALITION 4 JUVENILE JUSTICE continues to work in support of those incarcerated persons who received LWOP when they were under 18. According to our records 6 people have now been paroled and are living successfully in the community. Four or five have been transferred to gradual release. We are also beginning to consider those persons who received LWOP for crimes committed when they were over 18, but at an age when young brains are still considered underdeveloped. WE call this our 18+ group. It is a slow process. There are several persons in the under 18 range who have never responded to our letters and we assume that they probably are not interested in considering getting out of prison, for one reason or another. Unfortunately there are also several who were paroled and have since died: Robert Winfrey and Christine Fetters may they rest in peace.

## **CONCERN REGARDING NEW DEBIT CARD**

### **POLICY: "Where's the Money?"**

Iowa CURE has received word that the IDOC has found yet another way to exploit Iowa persons incarcerated in Iowa's prisons who use DEBIT CARDS. A new policy states that "the IDOC shall not refund money from the offender's previous card when a replacement DEBITEK card is issued." Supposedly, the remaining amount cannot be read. Those of us who use the cards know that this is not true as the amount remaining on the card is shown after each transaction. In a conversation with Director Bartruff he acknowledged that this is true. Staff at the Polk County Jail told us that they give people who are being discharged from the jail a check for the money that is remaining on their cards when they are discharged.

So where does the money left on these DEBITEK cards go when the incarcerated person gets a new card or discharges? We have asked Director Bartruff to find out and see that this policy is changed. We have checked the policy regarding the cards and it does say that the money remaining on the cards will not be returned; however the policy has not been approved by the Iowa Board of Corrections and does not have the Director's official signature on it; it is merely stamped with his signature.

The Department is in the process of approving a new contract with a new vending company and Director Bartruff has assured CURE Board Member Carla Dawson and myself that the money on the current cards will be transferred to the new system, but the question remains: "Where is the money" from the old cards?

## **NEW CONTRACT FOR PHONE SYSTEM IN POLK COUNTY JAILS**

Iowa CURE recently learned that the administration at Polk County jail is going to be considering a new contract for their prison phone system. We contacted the Board of Supervisors and Frank Marasco of the Sheriff's staff invited Carla Dawson and myself to come and share our ideas and concerns regarding this issue. It is our hope that we can see the new contract before it is finalized and also that a good system would become a model for other jails in Iowa.

We had a good conversation and found that we have a lot of

the same goals. We expressed our concerns regarding the confusing system with many middle contractors who charge fees to handle calls and make it much more expensive. We agree that communication between the prisoners and their families and legal counsel are extremely important and should not be limited due to high prices. We felt this was a very good meeting and that the door is open for communication in the future.

## **Iowa Justice Action Network**

### **(IJAN for short)**

**Iowa Justice Action Network (IJAN)** is a non-profit organization working to reduce mass incarceration and to create a criminal justice system that is fairer to all Iowans while protecting public safety. We educate the public about current injustices and realistic alternatives to mass incarceration and barriers for returning citizens through workshops, conferences and social media. See us on Face Book and/or visit our web page.

**IJAN** board members met with Tom Miller, Iowa State Attorney, in January to discuss mental health issues, substance abuse issues and the proposed death penalty legislation. Our goal is to focus on positive changes for our citizens.

**IJAN** in conjunction with Living Beyond the Bars and Iowans Against the Death Penalty, has presented two workshops dealing with realistic facts surrounding the death penalty; one on Martin Luther King Day in Cedar Rapids and one in Waterloo in February. We are planning two future workshops on this topic, one in Davenport and one in Des Moines. Presentations include an overview and history of the Death Penalty and the parents of a man currently serving a life sentence for murder whose case is now being handled by The Innocence Project.

**IJAN** and Living Beyond the Bars co-sponsored an Opioid Crisis Workshop in March on St. Patrick's Day. The panel consisted of an Assistant US Attorney, the co-founder of CRUSH (a community action and support group for people affected by Opioid addiction); a recovering Opioid addict, a counselor from Cedar Rapids Comprehensive Treatment and the state representative of Celebrate Recovery.

**IJAN** participated in Lobby Day on February 8. We had a good turn out and were able to meet with several senators, making points about Iowa's need for mental health and substance abuse treatment.

**IJAN** is planning a state wide conference in Cedar Falls in September to continue addressing issues of mass incarceration, disparity in sentencing, re-entry issues and family issues affecting the incarcerated. Our key note speaker will be Jeanne Bishop, author of Change Of Heart.

## **JUSTICE REFORM CONSORTIUM HOLDS ANNUAL LUNCHEON**

Representatives of the member organizations of the Justice Reform Consortium gathered on October 25 at the Valley United Methodist Church in West Des Moines for their annual meeting. The guest speaker was Angela Connolly. She has served on the Polk County Board of Supervisors since 1998 and is currently chairperson. In addition to serving on the board she has been very active in working to address the

needs of the homeless and those persons who need emergency assistance without being sent to jail. She was instrumental in the establishment of the 24 hour crisis center in Des Moines. She is hoping that a "sobering" center can soon be added to the services. Ms Connolly is especially concerned about the need to provide more help for persons suffering from mental illness.

The Consortium honored two persons who have contributed to a justice based criminal justice system. Mike Cervantes is Executive Director of the "Inside Out" re-entry program in Iowa City. The goal of the program is to help formerly incarcerated persons make a positive re-entry back into society. They help people find jobs, a place to live, and to connect into the community (See resource list elsewhere in this letter).

For many years Christy Lockheart made counted cross-stitch art work featuring the scales of justice to give to those honored at our annual luncheons. Christy is one of a number of persons who received a life sentence as a juvenile. Now, over 30 years later, she is out of prison on parole and doing well. In addition to providing the artwork, she has done research on juveniles serving life without parole and produced newsletters about this issue. Above all, she never gave up hope that one day those who received the LWOP sentence as juveniles would have the opportunity for parole.

Members of the Consortium receive the JRC newsletter which is written by legislative advocates, Marty Ryan and Stephanie Fawkes-Lee. The annual luncheon gives members a great opportunity to network and gain inspiration to continue the work.

## News Release

### Life after Prison: A New Guide for Iowans

Inside Out Reentry, with support from the Iowa Department of Corrections, is pleased to announce a new guide offering resources and services for those returning from incarceration.

- **WHAT:** A newly-created collaborative guide to reentry support resources across the state. This database provides contacts to non-department of corrections resources facilitating return to the community. The guide includes: substance abuse services, housing options, mental health resources, AA/NA, support groups and much more. The information has been made available at all nine Iowa correctional institutions (as of Dec. 15), in addition to the work release residential facilities. It is posted online at: <http://www.insideoutreentry.com/> and will be updated every 6 months.

This guide was created by Inside Out Reentry Community with the help of Iowa correctional staff from several institutions. We invite everyone to help us supplement this information to make our service directory complete. Please contact us at: [insideoutreentry@gmail.com](mailto:insideoutreentry@gmail.com) to add information or make corrections.

Inside Out Reentry Community is a non-profit organization based in Johnson County that provides comprehensive reentry support for those returning to our community after incarceration. Inside Out opened its doors in January 2015

and assists returning citizens with employment, housing, connecting to services, peer support, mentoring, and more.

- **WHY:** The Iowa Department of Corrections estimates that 95% of current inmates will eventually be released to their communities. The moment of release represents a critical point in time that can make or break an individual's successful reintegration into society. Our communities are better off when the women and men leaving prison find success in moving forward.

The Council of State Governments in a 2005 study states that '*ideally, an individual in prison has worked on cultivating relationships with community-based organizations and support systems as part of a larger reentry plan.*' By making these resources available before someone is released from prison, work release or jail, Iowa can foster connections with such organizations and support systems and thus, encourage successful reentry.

Besides making this database available in Iowa's prisons and work release centers, we also hope to make this information available to anyone who needs support after serving time in jail.

- **WHO BENEFITS:** Anybody who is looking for support and assistance following incarceration. Family members and friends of those returning from incarceration. (see testimonial on next page)

## Contacts

Mike Cervantes - Director of Inside Out Reentry Community 319-621-6263 [insideoutreentry@gmail.com](mailto:insideoutreentry@gmail.com)  
Catrina Carter - Director of Reentry and Treatment Services for Iowa DOC 515-725-5713 (office) 515-314-2645 (cell)  
Cord Overton - Communications Director for Iowa DOC 515-725-5707 (office) [cord.overton@iowa.gov](mailto:cord.overton@iowa.gov)

## Testimonial:

Dec. 19, 2017

I wanted to express my gratitude to the staff and volunteers at Inside Out Reentry. I am from Des Moines and with my mandatory on a drug offense expiring on Jan. 20, 2018, I was recently run up for parole.

While incarcerated, I have involved myself in many groups, activities and inmate council to prepare myself to transition smoothly and successfully into society and the work force. All of these "inside" activities were beneficial for me, yet I was still lacking in community-based connections necessary for my release. Housing was an especially difficult task for me to complete. However, with your recent state-wide resource directory and guide, I was able to personally connect with the director of an organization in Des Moines who quickly accepted me into one of their houses. It completed my parole plan and my parole was granted on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December.

This new guide is a great resource for men and women facing the challenges of release. Thank you so much to Inside Out for sharing this resource with all the institutions across Iowa.

Tom Schilling  
IMCC/Oakdale

## **Attorney and Author, Jeanne Bishop To Speak In Des Moines**

Plan to join us on October 8, 2018 when the Iowa Coalition 4 Juvenile Justice, a Focus Group of Iowa CURE will present a talk, of great interest to our times by Jeanne Bishop, attorney and author at a place and hour yet to be decided. Ms. Bishop, a graduate of Chicago's Northwestern Medhill School of Journalism and Northwestern University's Law School is also an Adjunct Professor of Law at Northwestern, as well as, an Assistant Public Defender in Cook County, Illinois. She is the author of **Change of Heart, Justice, Mercy & Making Peace With My Sister's Killer.** Since the murders of her family members, Ms Bishop has been a prominent advocate for gun violence prevention, abolition of the death penalty, exoneration of the innocent and the role of faith in the debate over executions. Her talk will be of great interest to attorneys, judges, law students, legislators, victims, ministers, priests, bishops, sisters and all those working for justice in our legal system. Hour and place of Ms Bishop's talk will be announced in the next CURE Newsletter. Mark the date now on your calendar.

## **CROSSROADS OF IOWA**

Crossroads of Iowa is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing programs to reduce drug-related recidivism for including those that return from a jail/prison treatment program. Their approach to teaching, and healing, and support is called "Therapeutic Community. Among their programs and classes are

Substance Abuse Confidential Support Group for Women  
Grief is a Five Letter Word  
Providing Opportunities for Ex-Offenders to Succeed (POETS)  
Des Moines Meditation and Mindfulness Group and  
Mindfulness Meditation for People in Recovery

They are located at The Friends House of Des Moines, [4211 Grand](#) in Des Moines, [515-633-7968](tel:515-633-7968),  
[Crossroadssoflowa.org](http://Crossroadssoflowa.org)

## **TREATMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN PRISON**

For many years now there has been a slogan in Corrections that puts forth the impression that "re-entry planning begins on entry to prison." Is this a reality or a myth? Many people enter prison and, perhaps some of the things they need may be identified on admission, but it may be years before they are allowed into the programs they need to be eligible for parole. This means that when the time comes for them to go before the parole board, they have not had the programs they need for parole, but they have not been allowed to be in those programs because they haven't been approved for parole or they haven't completed their mandatory. It's definitely a catch 22.

Several years ago Iowa CURE was made aware of the fact that there was a waiting list of 300 to 400 people waiting to get in to the drug treatment program at Mt. Pleasant. We started asking questions about this back log and were told that there would soon be another counselor added which would speed things up. Some people were released to get treatment in the community. We now understand that if people haven't gotten

into treatment in 10 months, they are given a packet for either drug treatment or Thinking 4 Change to complete. And 9 times out of 10 you are paroled just as if you had actually had the class. Should we be surprised when people re-offend?

## **Death Penalty**

The death penalty was introduced twice during the recent legislative session. House file 569 which would allow those convicted of first degree murder to be put to death by lethal injection. Senate Study Bill 3134 was designed to provide a limit deterrent in situations in which someone aged 18 or older kidnaps, rapes, and murders a minor or kills a peace officer in the line of duty. Both bills did not advance for a vote. Iowans Against the Death Penalty have been active opponents to this proposed legislation. In 2018 advocates and members for Iowans Against the Death Penalty have been traveling across the state to spread the message that Iowa does not need the death penalty reinstated. Iowans Against the Death Penalty had their 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration November 10<sup>th</sup> at the Marriott in downtown Des Moines. Federal Judge Mark Bennett was the guest speaker. Approximately 100 people attended the event. LUSH Cosmetics in Des Moines held their campaign against cruelty May 2017. This year they focused on campaigning against the death penalty. Witness to Innocence flew Paris Powell to be the guest speaker. Paris was convicted in 1997 of murder and sentenced to death. He was exonerated and freed in 2009. He is one of the 161 known innocent individuals that were once on death row and are now free. Iowans Against the Death Penalty applied for a grant and received campaign money from LUSH Cosmetics. This grant money allows the group to travel anywhere in Iowa and give a presentation. If you are interested in having this group present to a church, school, or community please contact IADP at [info@iowansagainstthedeathpenalty.org](mailto:info@iowansagainstthedeathpenalty.org).

## **Phone Charges**

Dear Friends, we now have a bill number which is S. 2520 and cosponsors from both parties. But unless we receive a lot of cosponsors, we will not even receive a hearing. PLEASE WRITE YOUR TWO SENATORS AT U.S. SENATE, WASHINGTON, DC 20510 AND URGE THEM TO COSPONSOR S. 2520. Charlie

A new bill could finally ban predatory inmate phone costs - The Verge

For nearly two decades, criminal justice reform advocates have been fighting to fix a [persistent and egregious flaw](#) in the US prison system: the frequently exorbitant cost of inmate phone calls, which can run up to [\\$17 for a 15-minute local phone call](#). A confluence of market failures, political intransigence, and public indifference has created a broken billing system that veteran Federal Communications Commission official Mignon Clyburn [has called](#) "the greatest, most distressing, type of injustice I have ever seen in the communications sector." Last Thursday, a bipartisan group of US senators [introduced a bill](#) that aims to restore federal authority to crack down on what prison reform advocates call the "[usurious](#)," "[abusive](#)," and "[exploitative](#)" business practices of a small handful of companies that dominate [the \\$1.2 billion US prison phone industry](#).

An [Obama-era policy](#) sought to rectify the matter by capping inmate calling fees at as low as 11 cents per minute, but President Trump's telecom chief Ajit Pai — facing a fierce legal attack from prison phone companies, including the two industry titans GTL and Securus — [refused to defend](#) a key portion of the rule last year. As a result, the rules are stuck in a legal quagmire.

\$17 for a 15-minute local phone call

For years, GTL and Securus have exerted effective [monopoly power](#) in many states to charge inmates, families, lawyers, and clergy excessive rates that can result in monthly bills of as much as \$500. For a struggling family whose former breadwinner may be locked up, that's a lot of money just to stay in touch with a loved one.

For Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), who introduced the [Inmate Calling Technical Corrections Act of 2018](#), addressing the problem of predatory prison phones rates is a practical, as well as moral, imperative. Numerous studies [dating back decades](#) have shown that family contact and communication reduces recidivism, making society safer and saving taxpayer money. "Our bipartisan legislation will help make sure that prison telecommunication rates are fair so family members can more easily afford to stay in touch with incarcerated loved ones, improving the odds that rehabilitated offenders will be able to become productive members of society upon their release," Duckworth [said in a statement](#) announcing the bill.

Criminal justice reform advocates say that sky-high prison phone costs often place a heavy financial burden on families. A 2015 [report by the Prison Policy Initiative](#), a nonprofit criminal justice reform [advocacy group](#), found that the average pre-incarceration income of state and federal inmates, who are [overwhelmingly male](#), is about \$19,000. A 2015 [study by the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights](#) found that one in three families goes into debt because of the high cost of maintaining phone contact with imprisoned loved ones. Eighty-seven percent of the family members forced to bear these costs are women, many with children.

"People in prison should not have to pay exorbitant fees just to talk on the phone with their kids, their clergy, or their counsel."

"People in prison should not have to pay exorbitant fees just to talk on the phone with their kids, their clergy, or their counsel," says Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI), who is co-sponsoring the bill with Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) and Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ). "It's bad for human rights, it's bad for our justice system, and it's bad for our taxpayers."

Choosing between communicating with an incarcerated family member or paying the utility bills is a dilemma that most Americans will never have to face, but it's one that directly affects many of the more than 2 million incarcerated Americans and their families, including more than 2 million children with parents behind bars.

"Family and clergy at some of the most difficult moments in their lives are being fleeced — they have no choice — pay up or cut off the people who need them the most," says Cheryl A. Lanza, policy advisor at [The United Church of Christ's media justice arm](#), which has long advocated for inmate calling reform. "The United Church of Christ takes seriously Jesus' injunction to remember the 'least of these,' particularly people in prison."

The Trump FCC's decision to [stop defending in-state rate caps](#) in federal court dealt a serious blow to criminal justice reform

advocates. Pai, a conservative Republican from Kansas with an extreme affinity for deregulation, argued that the Obama-era rules overstepped FCC authority. Last summer, a federal court agreed and ruled that the FCC's in-state rate caps were impermissible.

Pai, who has [said in the past](#) that he'd welcome a legislative solution to this problem, declined to comment on the Senate bill. But Democratic FCC commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel, who strongly supported the Obama-era rate caps, praised the measure as an antidote to her own agency's lack of progress on the issue.

"It's shameful that the FCC has stalled in its efforts to right this wrong," Rosenworcel said in a statement emailed to *The Verge*. "So it's good news that Senators Duckworth, Portman, Booker, and Schatz have stepped in and are leading the way to a fix with this legislative effort."

Criminal justice reform advocates say the lack of competition in the market for inmate calling services is a main cause of sky-high prison phone costs — hence the need for rate caps. The problem is exacerbated by the widespread use of so-called "site commissions," financial arrangements in which telecom companies return a chunk of their inmate calling revenue back to prisons, as *The Verge* reported in a [2016 investigation](#) of exorbitant prison phone rates.

"Kickbacks" create a perverse market incentive in which prison phone companies are awarded exclusive deals based on how much money they can send back to prisons

These payments, which critics call "[kickbacks](#)," create a perverse market incentive in which prison phone companies are awarded exclusive deals based not on how cheaply they can provide service, but rather how much money they can send back to prisons, in some extreme cases [as much as 90 percent](#) of a contract's value. The Senate bill would bolster the FCC's ability to discourage such financial arrangements as part of the agency's statutory mandate to ensure that prison phone rates are "just, reasonable, and fair."

At a time when lawmakers are focused on big-ticket issues like infrastructure, Duckworth and her Senate colleagues face an uphill battle to push their bill through Congress. (Duckworth introduced [a similar bill](#) last year that didn't even make it to the floor for a vote.) But the fact that the new bill has gained the backing of Portman, a conservative Republican, shows that the measure has the potential to attract even more GOP support. A companion bill in the House could be introduced as early as this week.

In a statement, a spokesperson for GTL said the company is "aware of the legislation and has a continued willingness to work with regulatory bodies to ensure that friends and family members are able to communicate in a secure and convenient manner with their incarcerated loved ones." A spokesperson for Securus did not respond to a request for comment.

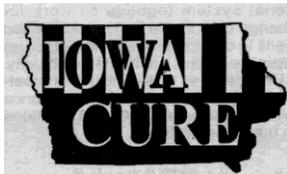
For Clyburn, easing the financial burden and personal hardship on families facing extreme phone rates has become the centerpiece of a [career of public service](#) devoted to expanding, enabling, and ensuring affordable communications access for every US citizen — especially those in underserved and marginalized communities.

"For far too long inmates and their loved ones have suffered under the burden of egregious inmate calling and video visitation rates," Clyburn [said in a statement](#) praising the new bill. "I look forward to the day where we can truly say that inmate calling rates across the nation are just and reasonable."

## CONTACT INFORMATION

<p><b>IOWA CURE</b>  Jean Basinger, Chair/Newletter Editor  P. O. Box 41005  Des Moines, IA 50311  Phone: 515-277-6296  <a href="mailto:jabwab@msn.com">jabwab@msn.com</a>; <a href="http://www.iowacure.org">www.iowacure.org</a>  Board Members: Anne Bickell, Peggy Aguilar, Eddie Bloomer, Jackie Robinson, Carla Dawson, Diane Crane, Carolyn Uhlehake, Brian Carter, Mary Kay Dial, Richard Nordin, Larry Smith, Sr. Joanne Talarico, Wendy Wittrock, Sue Hutchins, Shelia Corsbie</p>	<p><b>Voices To Be Heard / Des Moines CURE</b>  Support group for persons who have a love one in prison, parole or probation and those concerned about people in the criminal justice system. Meets the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tues – Wesley UMC.  Support group for adults and special program for children from 6 to 7:30 p.m.  Contacts: Jean Basinger 515-277-6296  <a href="mailto:jeanbasinger@gmail.com">jeanbasinger@gmail.com</a>,  Melissa Nelson 515-280-9027  <a href="mailto:melissa@chihousing.com">melissa@chihousing.com</a></p>
<p><b>IA-NE NAACP</b>  Betty Andrews, President,  1620 Pleasant St., Ste. 210  Des Moines, IA 50314</p>	<p><b>Life Long CURE</b>  Willis Harris  665 Willis St, Ste. B-1  Detroit, MI 48201, phone: <a href="tel:313-442-3929">313-442-3929</a>  Self-stamped, self-addressed envelope for brochure  <a href="mailto:everyonesmom4@comcast.net">everyonesmom4@comcast.net</a></p>
<p><b>CURE Sort – Sex Offenders Restored Through Treatment</b>  P. O. Box 761  Milwaukee, WI 53201-0761  <a href="mailto:wbowers8@cox.net">wbowers8@cox.net</a></p>	<p><b>CURE International</b>  Charlie and Pauline Sullivan  P. O. Box 2310  Washington, D. C. 20013  <a href="mailto:cure@curenational.org">cure@curenational.org</a></p>
<p><b>CURE for Vets</b>  535 Queen St  Philadelphia, PA 19147  <a href="mailto:Jcautilli2003@yahoo.com">Jcautilli2003@yahoo.com</a>  <a href="http://www.vets-cure.com">www.vets-cure.com</a></p>	<p><b>Iowa Coalition 4 Juvenile Justice</b>  (now a focus group for Iowa CURE)  Website: <a href="http://ia4juvenilejustice.org">ia4juvenilejustice.org</a>  Sr. JoAnn Talarico, Facilitator  P. O. Box 41005  Des Moines, IA 50311</p>
<p><b>Friends of Iowa Women Prisoners</b>  Website: <a href="http://friendsofiowawomenprisoners.org">friendsofiowawomenprisoners.org</a>  Facilitator: Kirk Knesset  <a href="mailto:knesset@preludeiowa.org">knesset@preludeiowa.org</a>  Phone: 515-225-8349  Meets 3<sup>rd</sup> Tues of each month at noon at Wesley UMC  800 E. 12<sup>th</sup> St, Des Moines, IA  <a href="http://www.iowacure.org">www.iowacure.org</a></p>	<p><b>Justice Reform Consortium</b>  Marty Ryan and Stephanie Fawkes-Lee, Legislative Advocates  <a href="mailto:mrtyrn@gmail.com">mrtyrn@gmail.com</a>  Legislative update sent out every 2 weeks during session  Contact Marty to receive it. Phone: 515-681-8076</p>
<p><b>Health Care for Re-Entry Veterans Program</b>  Brian Brooks: VA Medical Center, 3600 30<sup>th</sup> St,  Des Moines, IA 50310, 515-577-8068  <a href="mailto:Brian.brooks@va.com">Brian.brooks@va.com</a>; website: <a href="http://i.va.gov/homeless.page.cfm?pg_38">i.va.gov/homeless.page.cfm?pg_38</a>.  Eligible: Those who are currently incarcerated by the DOC-Fort Des Moines and prisons (not in jail or released from prison)</p>	<p><b>Help for Veterans</b>  Will visit incarcerated veterans in need in central Iowa  Jennifer Miner, 515-577-8892 or 699-5999 ext. 4875  <a href="mailto:Jennifer.miner@va.gov">Jennifer.miner@va.gov</a>  Covers eastern Iowa: Sherri Koob, Veterans Justice Outreach, cell: 563-320-9887; <a href="mailto:sherri.koob@va.gov">sherri.koob@va.gov</a></p>
<p><b>Living Beyond the Bars</b>  Sue Hutchins, facilitator, <a href="mailto:Sue@yahoo.com">Sue@yahoo.com</a></p>	<p><b>A note about Iowa CURE:</b> We are an organization with members in and out of the prison system. We cannot offer legal services or accept phone calls from prisoners. Letters will be answered to the best of our ability. Do not send us your legal documents. In joining CURE, you are <b>NOT</b> entering into a contract for services</p>

**IOWA CURE**  
**P. O. BOX 41005**  
**Des Moines, IA 50311**



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