



PREVENTING VIOLENCE
AND DEVELOPING
YOUTH LEADERS

YOUTH ALIVE!
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September 3, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of the State of California
State Capitol, 1st Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

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Youth ALIVE!
Oakland, CA

Re: Request Signature on SB 555 (Mitchell): Jail FACTS Act

Dear Governor Newsom,

On behalf of Youth ALIVE!, I request your signature on SB 555 - the Jail Fair Access for Connections to Support (FACTS) Act. The Jail FACTS Act will reduce the heavy financial burden placed on the families and support systems of incarcerated youth and adults. SB 555 aims to reduce the exorbitant costs of communications (including phone calls and video calls), regulate the prices for goods sold inside county jails (hygiene products and food), and require that profits made from these services are reinvested to support people incarcerated in California county juvenile facilities and jails, as well as their transition back into their communities.

Youth ALIVE! is a nationally recognized community-based organization known for initiating an alliance to treat violence as a public health crisis and developing young leaders in the process. Tasked as Oakland's anchor organization for violence prevention, intervention, and healing, Youth ALIVE! has maintained a successful track record of implementing evidence-based violence intervention and prevention services. Our decades of experience providing resources to formerly incarcerated individuals informs our support for SB 555.

California county juvenile facilities have been shown to charge as much as \$13.65 for a 15-minute phone call. Furthermore, markups on commissary items make it difficult, if not impossible, for incarcerated people to afford basic necessities. The high cost of utilizing these services disrupts not only the economic stability of incarcerated people, but also their families and support systems on the outside. SB 555 caps the cost of juvenile facility and jail calls at 5 cents per-minute, and video communications at 25 cents per-minute, and caps markups on jail commissary items to no more than 10% over the vendor cost. This will make communication, food and basic hygiene items more affordable for people incarcerated in California county jails and juvenile facilities.

These costs have devastating impacts on families and communities, specifically those financially supporting incarcerated loved ones. Research shows that 1 in 3 families with incarcerated loved ones go into debt due to the costs of phone calls



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and visits alone.¹ The cost of keeping in touch with incarcerated people falls most heavily on their families, and disproportionately on low-income women of color. Because of these costs, incarcerated people often lose connection with support systems on the outside. This can have serious mental health implications and makes the process of preparing for reentry even more difficult.

Current state law mandates that profit generated from commissary and phone calls be placed into the Inmate Welfare Fund (IWF), and states that the IWF must be used “primarily” for the wellbeing of incarcerated people. SB 555 mandates that the fund be used “solely” for the education and welfare of inmates, ending raids on the fund.

This issue is gaining national momentum: Texas prisons have cut phone call costs from 26 cents per minute to 6 cents per minute; New York City and San Francisco have eliminated the cost of jail calls altogether; California has reduced the cost of calls in state prisons. There is also a legislative effort underway at the federal level to increase the Federal Communications Commission’s ability to regulate the cost of calls from jails and prisons. But still, our jails fall behind. It is time for California to adopt the solution provided by SB 555.

By passing SB 555, California can become a champion and leader in promoting economic stability within communities most impacted by the criminal justice system. Youth ALIVE! respectfully requests that you sign SB 555 into law.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kyndra Simmons". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and "S".

Kyndra Simmons
Intervention Director

Cc: Emily Harris, Ella Baker Center (jailfacts@gmail.com)
Governor Newsom’s Office (leg.unit@gov.ca.gov)

¹ “Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families.” Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Forward Together, & Action Design, Sept. 2015, available at: whopaysreport.org/who-pays-full-report/