



April 2024

Minnesota General Assembly
75 Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard
St Paul, MN 55155

Dear Minnesota State Legislators,

For years, Minnesota families have had to make unconscionable decisions to afford to stay connected with their incarcerated loved ones. Despite years of pleas for help, Minnesota families continue to have to penny pinch just so a child can hear the soothing sound of their parent's voice for a few minutes. Minnesota families need our leaders to take a stand — it is long past due.

We, the undersigned coalition of directly impacted and allied organizations, urge the Minnesota legislature to pass SF4387 and HF4438 to stop charging families for prison communication.

Every year, Minnesota families spend an estimated \$1.7 million lining the pockets of the state's private telecom provider to talk to their incarcerated loved ones. Many are trapped in a cycle of debt and poverty, and the financial impact is felt most acutely by Black, Brown, and low-income communities, which are disproportionately impacted by racist over-policing, harsh sentencing guidelines, and mass criminalization. In fact, over 50 percent of families with an incarcerated loved one struggle to meet basic housing and food needs.¹ One in three families goes into debt just to stay in touch with a loved one behind bars, and women — largely Black and Brown women — carry 87 percent of the burden.²

This session, we ask you to make our communities safer while also protecting some of our state's most marginalized families, those struggling to support their loved ones behind bars who cannot share or hear simple comforting words without threatening their own financial stability. We ask that you act now to remove the financial burden of connecting with an incarcerated loved one by passing SF4387 and HF4438.

Sincerely,

¹ Shanahan, Ryan and Sandra Villalobos Agudelo. "The Family and Recidivism." American Jails, 2012.

² *Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families*, Ella Baker Center, Forward Together, Research Action Design (2015), available at <https://ellabakercenter.org/who-pays-the-true-cost-of-incarceration-on-families>.

End Mass Incarceration Coalition

Get Repowered

ISAIAH

Minnesota Freedom Fund

Minnesota Wrongfully Convicted Judicial Reform

Minneapolis NAACP

Teaching Ourselves New Examples to Uplift People (TONE UP)

Twin Cities Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee

Voqal

We Are All Criminals

We Resolve

Worth Rises

Wrongfully Incarcerated & Over-Sentenced Families Council-MN