



September 2, 2022

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

Re: Request Signature on SB 1008 (Becker)—Keep Families Connected Act

Dear Governor Newsom:

The National Consumer Law Center (NCLC)¹ requests your signature on Senate Bill 1008, the Keep Families Connected Act, which would provide free phone calls in all California juvenile halls and state prisons and remove a heavy financial burden imposed on incarcerated people and their loved ones and support systems.

The high cost of phone calls services extracts tens of millions of dollars from low-income people every year and disproportionately impacts Black and Brown communities in California. The excessive cost of these services has created needless financial hardship and prevented incarcerated people from having more regular contact with their support systems on the outside.

The economic instability caused by the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the financial strain on those who already were struggling to maintain contact with loved ones. The Ella Baker Center reported that even before the COVID-19 pandemic, one-third of families with incarcerated loved ones went into debt because of the cost of communication and visits.² 87% of those carrying these costs are women, disproportionately Black and Brown women. By making phone calls from juvenile halls and state prisons free, SB 1008 would ensure that incarcerated people can stay connected.

Free communication does not simply benefit incarcerated people and their families. Research shows that those who maintain contact with their families during incarceration are more likely to

¹ The National Consumer Law Center (NCLC) is a nonprofit organization that engages in research, education, advocacy, and litigation to advance economic justice for low-income and other disadvantaged people, including people of color and older adults. NCLC works with nonprofit and legal services organizations, private attorneys, policymakers, federal and state governments, and courts across the nation to protect low-income people from harmful lending and debt collection practices, help financially stressed families build and retain wealth, and advance economic fairness. Through its Criminal Justice Debt Project, NCLC works to address fines-and-fees policies that criminalize poverty and strip wealth from communities of color, as well as abuses by private actors, including prison telecommunications companies.

² Saneta deVuono-powell, et al., Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Forward Together, and Research Action Design, Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families 9 (2015), <http://whopaysreport.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Who-Pays-FINAL.pdf>.

reenter society successfully.³ As one researcher summarized, “Every known study that has been able to directly examine the relationship between a prisoner’s legitimate community ties and recidivism has found that feelings of being welcome at home and the strength of interpersonal ties outside prison help predict postprison adjustment.”⁴ In this way, regular communication between incarcerated people and their support systems benefits the State of California and our society more broadly. Given that the entire state benefits, struggling families should not be the only ones who pay for it.

In response to efforts led by directly impacted people, jurisdictions around the country have started to make calls free.⁵ California counties have been leaders in this movement. In August 2020, San Francisco made all jail phone calls free,⁶ and in 2021 San Diego County announced that all phone calls from its county jails and juvenile facilities would be free.⁷ Los Angeles County has stated that it will explore how it can do the same.⁸ And the California Public Utilities Commission temporarily capped rates on all intrastate phone calls made by incarcerated people at 7 cents per minute, the lowest such cap in the country.⁹

By signing SB 1008 into law, California can become a state champion and leader in promoting economic security, racial equity, and community safety within communities most impacted by the criminal legal system.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue and for your support of incarcerated people and their families.

Sincerely,

Ariel Nelson, Staff Attorney
National Consumer Law Center
7 Winthrop Square

³ Ryan Shanahan & Sandra Villalobos Agudelo, *The Family and Recidivism*, American Jails (Sept. 2012), <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/vera/the-family-and-recidivism.pdf>.

⁴ Joan Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry* 246 (2006) (emphasis in original).

⁵ See Daniel A. Rosen, *Connecticut Makes All Prison Communications Free, Makes History*, Prison Legal News (Aug. 1, 2021), <https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/2021/aug/1/connecticut-makes-all-prison-communications-free-makes-history/> (noting that New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego have made jail phone calls free, and Connecticut became the first state to take this step for its prison population).

⁶ Matthew Green, *San Francisco Permanently Scraps Jail Phone Call Fees*, KQED (July 14, 2020), [kqed.org/news/11828999/san-francisco-moves-to-permanently-scrap-phone-call-fees-product-markups-at-county-jails](https://www.kqed.org/news/11828999/san-francisco-moves-to-permanently-scrap-phone-call-fees-product-markups-at-county-jails).

⁷ Kelly Davis, *San Diego County to make inmate phone calls free*, San Diego Union-Tribune (Mar. 2, 2021), [sandiegouniontribune.com/news/watchdog/story/2021-03-02/san-diego-county-to-make-inmate-phone-calls-free](https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/watchdog/story/2021-03-02/san-diego-county-to-make-inmate-phone-calls-free).

⁸ Elizabeth Marcellino, *LA County considers making expensive jail phone calls free*, Los Angeles Daily News (May 18, 2021), [dailynews.com/2021/05/18/la-county-considers-making-expensive-jail-calls-free/](https://www.dailynews.com/2021/05/18/la-county-considers-making-expensive-jail-calls-free/).

⁹ Press Release, California Public Utilities Commission, CPUC Caps Phone Rates for Those Incarcerated (Aug. 19, 2021), [cpuc.ca.gov/news-and-updates/all-news/cpuc-caps-phone-rates-for-those-incarcerated#:~:text=Today's%20decision%20imposes%20a%20per,\(IPCS\)%20operating%20within%20California](https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/news-and-updates/all-news/cpuc-caps-phone-rates-for-those-incarcerated#:~:text=Today's%20decision%20imposes%20a%20per,(IPCS)%20operating%20within%20California).

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cc: The Honorable Josh Becker, California State Senator