

HB 2738 Fact Sheet

Problem: The new technology of video visitation is increasingly common in prisons and jails across the United States. But companies are cutting off contact visits and charging exorbitant rates for this technology.

HB2738: Protect Prison Visits Bill

Sponsored by: Rep Carol Ammons

When Maya Schenwar tried to schedule a video visitation with her sister in Lake County jail, "Securus' technology failed to connect me with my sister, so I spent the half hour on the phone with tech support instead, crying."

Many families express disappointment from using the video visitation systems being installed at a rapid pace in Illinois jails and prisons. They can spend \$25 for a single call and only see their loved one over a grainy computer screen.

A study conducted by Prison Policy Initiative found that at least 15 counties in Illinois currently have video visitation systems in their jails. Several of them (such as Boon, Kankakee, Lake, and Will County) have cancelled in-person visits with their installation.

Additionally, these video calls are much more expensive than phones. When Illinois implements new phone rates in 2018, the calls will be 11 cents a minute. Typically, video calls are one dollar a minute.

Solution: HB2738 would ensure:

- Any correctional facilities that use video also provide in-person visitation.
- Fees cannot exceed operating cost of visitation.
- All prisons must provide at least one visit per seven-day period.

In 2016, with bipartisan support, the Illinois legislature passed **HB6200: The Family Connections Bill** to lower the cost of phone calls from Illinois prisons. Out of this legislation, a consensus emerged that people incarcerated and their families benefit from easy and affordable access to phone services. Thousands of children in Illinois have a parent incarcerated. Regular communication not only reduces recidivism, but keeps families strong.

National Movement:

A similar bill in Massachusetts seeks to regulate video visitation.

Illinois Congresswoman Tammy Duckworth is currently sponsoring the Video Visitation in Prisons Act, which has gained more than 80,000 petition signatures.*

HB2738 protects the rights of those incarcerated to have human contact with their loved ones. Illinois has the opportunity to set a national standard for protecting the right of families to stay in touch during a period of incarceration.

*See two petitions, one circulated by Care2, a second by Color of Change.

Illinois Campaign for Prison Phone Justice
A project of the Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center