

In California, how much do parents pay to talk to their children who are locked up in county juvenile facilities?

It varies by geography. Many county juvenile facilities charge high prices and profit from phone calls to fund their operations. Parents and young people pay the price.

The cost of a 15-minute phone call with a young person incarcerated in a juvenile facility varies from county to county in California. In some counties, these calls are free. However, this isn't the case in all California counties. A 15-minute call from a youth to their family can range from \$2.40 in Solano County to \$6.25 in Santa Cruz County to a whopping \$13.65 in San Benito County. The table to the right provides a sample of published phone rates across California counties.^{1,2}

A key part of the stated purpose of California's juvenile justice system is "to preserve and strengthen [a] minor's family ties whenever possible."³ High-priced phone calls do just the opposite. The high cost of juvenile facility phone calls is an impediment to maintaining meaningful contact between family members—contact that is critical for prosocial youth development and reducing recidivism.⁴ Many families cannot afford to talk to their children and some families go into debt trying to maintain connections with their children. The economic burden of phone calls primarily falls on low-income families of color.

“ I had to choose between putting my son in sports or paying for my daughter's phone bill. I allowed my daughter to call home as much as she wanted because I knew she needed to hear my voice, so my bill was very high.”
— Angelica, parent whose child was recently released from a juvenile hall in Los Angeles

“ These phone charges are yet one more oppressive practice in California's failing juvenile justice system that disproportionately harms our Black and brown youth and their families, and perpetuates intergenerational poverty.”
— Dominique D. Nong, Director of Youth Justice Policy, Children's Defense Fund-California

While phone call charges strain families, juvenile facilities and phone service companies profit from them. This is an unjust practice that must end. We should not be gouging parents and families to simply stay in touch with their children. [Senate Bill 555, introduced by California State Senator Holly Mitchell, would lower rates charged for telephone and other communication services between people held in county jails and juvenile facilities and their families on the outside.](#) This will help support strong relationships between young people and their families and promote successful reentry and improved community safety.

▶▶ THE PRICE OF JUSTICE, BY GEOGRAPHY

| County | Cost for 15-minute phone call | Cost over one month* |
|--------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Solano | \$2.40 | \$72.00 |
| Contra Costa | \$3.00 | \$90.00 |
| San Joaquin | \$3.15 | \$94.50 |
| Orange | \$3.45 | \$103.50 |
| Los Angeles | \$3.75 | \$112.50 |
| Sonoma | \$3.75 | \$112.50 |
| Kern | \$4.65 | \$139.50 |
| San Diego | \$4.95 | \$148.50 |
| Placer | \$5.55 | \$166.50 |
| Tulare | \$6.00 | \$180.00 |
| Santa Cruz | \$6.25 | \$187.50 |
| Humboldt | \$6.30 | \$189.00 |
| Fresno | \$6.75 | \$202.50 |
| Merced | \$7.20 | \$216.00 |
| Alameda | \$12.75 | \$382.50 |
| Napa | \$13.45 | \$403.50 |
| San Benito | \$13.65 | \$409.50 |

* The cost for a family to speak to a youth for 15 minutes every day for one month (30 days).

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

We urge you to send a letter of support to the California Assembly Appropriations Committee and tell your legislator to support Senate Bill 555. For additional information, please visit [Young Women's Freedom Center](#).

1 Data on phone rates was gathered on August 6, 2020 from Global Tel Link (GTL), ICSolutions (ICS), and Securus Technologies websites.

2 In response to the COVID-19 health pandemic, some counties have begun providing free phone/video calls.

3 Cal. Welf. & Inst. Code § 202(a).

4 Stephanie Kollmann, Parents as Partners: Family Connection and Youth Incarceration, Children And Family Justice Center (February 2018). Available at: <https://www.law.northwestern.edu/legalclinic/cfjc/documents/communitysafetyfeb.pdf>