

How much do California jails charge incarcerated people for toothpaste, soap, and coffee?

The answer varies by geography. But almost all California jails see their jail store/commissary as a profit center to fund jail operations. It's incarcerated people and their families who pay the price.

Incarcerated people often purchase items sold in jail stores, called commissaries.

Incarcerated people must pay for key necessities, such as stationary, stamps, soup, coffee, rice and beans, and hygiene items. Local California governments contract with private companies to provide commissary items to individuals in county jails. Charging high prices for commissary items is common across the country. This practice generates funds for county jail operations, and nets large profits for the corporations that jails contract with. The county jails set the prices and take a commission or profit on each product sold. **This system is unjust. It takes money away from incarcerated people and their families and puts it in the pockets of private companies and sheriff's departments.**

Government profit rates across California

typically range from 25% to 54%. San Francisco is the only county to have eliminated commissary markups. The table to the right provides a sample of government profit rates that counties receive from commissary services.

Many people cannot afford to buy basic items from the jail store. The high price of commissary is a significant drain on low-income people and disproportionately burdens communities of color.

The economic burden of phone calls and commissary costs primarily falls on low-income women of color who are supporting loved ones inside. Many incarcerated people report choosing between staying in touch with their families (paying for phone calls and stationary), addressing hunger and getting enough to eat (paying for protein and food items), and staying clean (paying for personal hygiene and cleaning supplies). During the COVID-19 health pandemic, incarcerated people report feeling safer eating items purchased from the commissary.

“ I understand it's a business, but I feel exploited. This is jail, not a 7-Eleven.”

- Incarcerated Person in California County Jail



THE PRICE OF JUSTICE, BY GEOGRAPHY

County	Government Profit	County	Government Profit
San Francisco	0%	Humboldt	40%
Calaveras	25%	Sutter	40%
Nevada	25%	San Bernardino	43%
Kings	28%	Shasta	44%
Mendocino	28%	San Joaquin	45%
Napa	28%	Kern	45%
Colusa	29%	Riverside	45%
Amador	34%	Santa Barbara	45%
Santa Cruz	34%	Butte	48%
Plumas	35%	Fresno	48%
Lassen	38%	San Mateo	49%
Alameda	40%	Sacramento	54%



The cost of commissary items varies from county to county. Incarcerated people and their families pay very different prices depending on the county in which they reside.

- **A bar of soap** ranges from \$0.60 to \$2.25.
- **A packet of ramen** ranges from \$0.40 to \$1.25.
- **A small tube of toothpaste** ranges from \$0.85 to \$3.60.
- **A bag of chips** ranges from \$0.45 to \$2.00.



“ I have to wait until outside family has enough to send me money.”

- Incarcerated Person in California County Jail

Senate Bill 555, introduced by California State Senator Holly Mitchell, proposes to reduce markups on commissary store items, as well as reduce rates and eliminate many fees associated with county jail communications.

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](http://YoungWomen'sFreedomCenter.org).