

Robert Ruffner
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Ms. Fahy, Representative Warren and Senator Deshambault:

My name is Robert Ruffner and I testified in favor of LD-1175 on April 14, 2021. I also proposed amending 1175 to prohibit charging for calls from incarcerated individuals to attorneys.

During my testimony I made reference to conversations I had with other defender organizations around the country in the past. In response to a question posed during my testimony I indicated I would enquire again on the issue of collect calls from inmates to their attorneys.

I have included the responses from 2015 as well as the response from 2021. I have included the actual email responses and summarized them here:

2021:

Minnesota responded by email from the State Public Defender, William Ward, and with a phone call from Professor Fred Friedman from University of Minnesota Duluth.

Mr. Ward provided Minnesota's statute, also included, which prohibits charging for calls from jails or prisons to attorneys. Professor Friedman in his phone call emphasized that MN 481.10 was passed with broad bipartisan support after efforts to negotiate with the phone providers failed time and time again. Professor Friedman also noted that the free calls made may jail administrators happy in that they eliminated frequent but brief jail visits to simply answer "2 minute yes or no questions". [In Maine, this would also result in a direct savings to the State by replacing inefficient jail visits with shorter telephone calls.]

2015:

Ventura County, CA - Inmates can call for free. They can call the main number or the number for the specific attorney.

Harris County, TX - Inmates can call the office on a toll free number from the jail. Securus was the provider in Harris County. Harris County Public Defender Alex Bruin notes that a single number solution would not work in a system, such as Maine, where there is no central office and multiple jails.

Greenville County (13th Judicial Circuit), SC - Inmates can call a dedicated line "jail line" from the county jail. The switchboard then transfers to the appropriate attorney.

WI- Has been able to negotiate free calls to defender offices, but not to private attorneys who also take cases (Maine would be 100% individual attorneys). The Deputy State Public Defender, Mike Tobin, also echoed the testimony of many of the individuals who testified last week noting "On the broader question of the wisdom of requiring calls to family to be collect, there may be research regarding the adverse effect upon pro-social relationships that tend to prevent recidivism."

King County, WA - All calls from the jail to defender offices are without charge.

I hope that this answers the questions raised during my testimony. Please let me know if there is any additional information the Committee would like before the work session. I would be more than happy to make myself available if there are further questions during the work session.

Respectfully,

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