

Press Release...



FROM THE OFFICE OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE LA SHAWN K. FORD

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For More Information:

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Ford Wants an Audit of Prison Inmate Phone Rates

CHICAGO, IL – Because of extremely high charges for inmate telephone calls, today State Rep. La Shawn K. Ford (D-Chicago) filed a House Resolution (HR0099) demanding an audit of the selection process of telephone vendors for state prisons. The resolution would direct the Auditor General to conduct a management audit of the state's procurement process in selecting inmate telephone service vendors for the Illinois Department of Corrections' (IDOC) inmate telephone service program. The criteria that guide the selection process of vendors by the Department of Central Management Services would be evaluated, with the goal of ensuring that adequate and uniform standards apply to all competing vendors.

Inmate telephone services are provided to inmates of facilities operated by IDOC so inmates can communicate with family members, friends and legal counsel. Inmates can use the equipment for pre-paid collect or post-paid collect operator-assisted calls only to connect with members of the public at telephones located outside of the facilities. Illinois is one of 42 states in the United States that selects an inmate telephone service vendor based in part on the percentage of revenue the state will receive from that vendor.

"Too often I hear from families asking me to help reduce the burden of high telephone bills from family members in Illinois' state prisons. It is a shame for it to be cheaper to call another country than it is to call an Illinois phone number from prison. This is not fair, and families should not have to suffer from unnecessarily high telephone rates," said Ford.

Ford continued, "High rates on inmate telephone calls not only impact those incarcerated but also affect family members. Most inmates come from low-income households, and these exorbitant telephone rates put an extra burden on families who have to pay these charges. Those who are least likely to have an alternate method of communication are targeted by these rates. Communication between family members should be made easier, not harder. Inmates who have contact with family members have better morale and lower rates of recidivism.

"The IDOC has no incentive to select the telephone vendor that offers the lowest rates; in fact, the selection process works to increase profits gained from poor families in Illinois," Ford concluded.

For more information, contact one of Ford's constituent service offices: 816 S. Oak Park Avenue in Oak Park at 708-445-3673, 5104 W. Chicago Avenue in Chicago at 773-378-5902 or in the Stratton Office Building in Springfield at 217-782-5962. More information is also available online at www.lashawnford.com or at <http://ilga.gov/legislation/BillStatus.asp?DocTypeID=HR&DocNum=99&GAID=12&SessionID=85&LegID=74658>.