



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**The New York City Jails Action Coalition responds to inclusion of \$20.5 million in projected revenues from jail commissary operations, vending machines and surcharges on telephone calls in New York City Mayor's 2018 Executive Budget:** <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/mm4-17.pdf>

**The New York City Jails Action Coalition said:** "It is unconscionable that NYC, which holds itself up as a progressive beacon, relies on extorting people incarcerated in City jails and their family members for a portion of its revenues. Nearly 80 percent of people held in City Jails are there pre-trial, unable to fight their cases at liberty solely because they cannot pay bail amounts sought by District Attorneys and set by Judges. The majority of these individuals are indigent. Yet, the City sees fit to charge exorbitant fees on phone calls and other necessities in order to pad its revenue lines. This practice must end.

At the same time, the City is providing free phone calls through LinkNYC for individuals who are not incarcerated. Free phone access and reduced charges should be the norm for people in our jails as well. There is no place for predatory revenue generating schemes by our City government and its agencies. The City should be working to close Rikers Island, reduce the jail population, and improve successful reentry through encouraging family and community contacts.

More than 90% of people held in City jails are people of color, and nearly all come from neighborhoods that are already marginalized by a host of City and social policies. If Mayor Bill de Blasio wants to reduce economic inequality in New York City as he claims, why not eliminate these fees, which would have the impact of injecting a \$20 million per year stimulus back into the neighborhoods that need it most?

The \$20 million noted above is only a portion of the money extracted through the courts and criminal justice system from communities around the city, with low-income communities of color the hardest hit."

**Additional Quotes:**

**Lisa Schreibersdorf, Executive Director of Brooklyn Defender Services,** said: "Exorbitant rates for calls from City jails punish whole families and exacerbate inequality. When our clients are in jail and unable to generate income, the government should be helping them stay connected with their support networks, not generating revenue from this deprivation."

**Sarah Kerr, Staff Attorney at the Legal Aid Society,** responded: "Individuals in our City jails should not be paying high surcharges for telephone calls, disciplinary hearings, commissary, vending machines and other services. This practice is unduly punitive and is contrary to goals of rehabilitation, successful reentry and reduced recidivism. It unnecessarily discourages family members from visiting individuals in the jails and is a hardship on marginalized communities that require our support. The often indigent population of our jails must not be burdened as a source of revenue."

**Robin Steinberg, Executive Director of The Bronx Defenders,** said: "It is no secret that our city's criminal justice system is profoundly unjust and that our city's jails are disproportionately filled with New Yorkers from low-income communities of color. To profit from that in any way is morally reprehensible. City officials should be looking for ways to mitigate the economic impacts of incarceration, not work them into their budgets."

"Instead of squeezing every last dollar out of families facing incarceration, this administration should encourage family contact, invest in communities, and save money by shrinking our criminal justice system and moving more quickly towards closing Rikers," **Janos Marton, Director of Policy & Campaigns, JustLeadershipUSA**

"We could drastically reduce the Department of Correction budget by reducing the number of people who are incarcerated pretrial," said **Jennifer J. Parish, Director of Criminal Justice Advocacy at the Urban Justice Center Mental Health Project.** "The City should not be profiting off poor people."

**About the New York City Jails Action Coalition:** JAC is a coalition of activists that includes formerly incarcerated and currently incarcerated people, family members and other community members who are working to promote human rights, dignity and safety for people in New York City jails. More at: <http://nycjac.org/>

<http://osc.state.ny.us/audits/allaudits/093014/13n1.pdf>

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