

# PRESS RELEASE

Human Rights Defense Center  
*For Immediate Release*



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## **Shareholder Resolution Seeks to Lower Prison Phone Rates at Corrections Corporation of America Facilities**

Nashville, TN – Just before Thanksgiving, a shareholder resolution was filed with Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) – the nation’s largest for-profit prison company – that seeks to reduce the high cost of phone calls made by prisoners at CCA facilities.

Prison phone rates are typically much higher than non-prison rates, and a 15-minute call from a prisoner to his or her family can cost up to \$17.30. Such exorbitant costs make it difficult for prisoners to maintain contact with their families and children on a regular basis; an estimated 2.7 million children in the United States have an incarcerated parent. The costs of prison phone calls are usually borne by prisoners’ families, not the prisoners themselves.

In September, the Federal Communications Commission issued an order capping the cost of long distance prison phone calls. FCC Commissioner Mignon Clyburn remarked that “Studies have shown that having meaningful contact beyond prison walls can make a real difference in maintaining community ties, promoting rehabilitation, and reducing recidivism. Making these calls more affordable can facilitate all of these objectives and more.” However, the FCC’s order has not yet gone into effect and does not apply to in-state prison phone calls.

Thus, Alex Friedmann, associate director of the Human Rights Defense Center (HRDC), a non-profit organization dedicating to protecting the human rights of prisoners and detainees, submitted a shareholder resolution that asks CCA to reduce the cost of phone calls made by prisoners held at the company’s correctional and immigration detention facilities.

HRDC is a co-founder and coordinator of the Campaign for Prison Phone Justice, in conjunction with the Center for Media Justice/Media Action Grassroots Network (MAG-Net) and Working Narratives. The Campaign was instrumental in the FCC’s decision to take action against high prison phone rates and other abuses by the prison phone industry.

The shareholder resolution requests that CCA not accept “commissions” – kickbacks paid by prison phone companies, usually based on a percentage of revenue generated by prisoners’ phone calls. Commission kickbacks correlate with higher prison phone rates, and eight states (including California and New York) have banned prison phone commissions.

Further, the resolution asks that CCA “give the greatest consideration to the overall lowest” costs when evaluating or entering into prison phone contracts at its facilities. The resolution notes that at one CCA-operated facility in Tennessee, the company receives a 48% kickback and that a 15-minute call from the facility “can cost as much as \$9.75.” CCA received \$205,136.78 in prison phone commissions at that one facility in fiscal year 2012 alone.

“As the largest private prison and detention corporation in the country, CCA has a responsibility to ensure that the families of incarcerated individuals are able to maintain the vital relationships needed in the rehabilitation process,” stated Steven Renderos, national organizer for the Center for Media Justice. “For immigrants in detention, a phone call can be the difference between securing adequate legal representation or not being able to see their families again.”

If the resolution receives a majority vote of CCA’s shareholders, it will require the company to ensure its prison phone contracts comply with the terms of the resolution within 180 days, and to report to shareholders the phone rates and commissions at its facilities on an annual basis.

Recently, CCA vice president Kim White wrote that rehabilitation and reentry programs are a “top priority” for the company. “It is important to us to see inmates grow during their incarceration, offering them the chance at a better life for themselves and their families after their release,” she said. “This is part of our responsibility to society as a corrections company, and it’s also essential to serving our government partners and taxpayers well.”

“This resolution gives CCA an opportunity to prove they are truly interested in rehabilitating prisoners and reducing recidivism,” Friedmann stated. “By decreasing the high costs of prison phone calls, the company can promote greater communication between prisoners and their families and children, which research has shown results in improved post-release outcomes and lower rates of recidivism. Or, if CCA is primarily concerned about its profit margin, it will object to the resolution and try to prevent it from going to a shareholder vote.”

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The Human Rights Defense Center, founded in 1990 and based in Lake Worth, Florida, is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to protecting the human rights of people held in U.S. detention facilities. HRDC publishes *Prison Legal News* (PLN), a monthly magazine that includes reports, reviews and analysis of court rulings and news related to prisoners’ rights and criminal justice issues. PLN has around 7,000 subscribers and operates a website ([www.prisonlegalnews.org](http://www.prisonlegalnews.org)) that includes a comprehensive database of prison and jail-related articles, news reports, court rulings, verdicts, settlements and related documents. HRDC is a co-founder and coordinator of the Campaign for Prison Phone Justice ([www.phonejustice.org](http://www.phonejustice.org)).

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