

PRESS RELEASE

Human Rights Defense Center
For Immediate Release



December 2, 2013

Shareholder Resolution Seeks to Lower Prison Phone Rates at GEO Group Facilities

Boca Raton, FL – Just before Thanksgiving, a shareholder resolution was filed with The GEO Group, Inc. – the nation’s second largest for-profit prison company – that seeks to reduce the high cost of phone calls made by prisoners at GEO 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 based in Lake Worth, Florida that is dedicating to protecting the human rights of prisoners and detainees, submitted a shareholder resolution that asks The GEO Group 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 GEO 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. Eight states (including California and New York) have banned prison phone commissions.

Further, the resolution asks that GEO “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 GEO-operated facility in Florida the company receives a 35% kickback, which generated \$125,600 in prison phone commissions at that facility in fiscal year 2012 alone.

“Given that GEO Group is the nation’s second-largest for-profit prison corporation, it has a moral and ethical responsibility to provide rehabilitative opportunities to the prisoners held in its facilities to ensure they successfully return to their communities following their release and are less likely to commit crimes,” said HRDC prison phone justice campaign director David Ganim. “Enhancing communication between prisoners and their families and children by reducing the cost of prison phone calls would help accomplish this worthy goal.”

If the resolution receives a majority vote of GEO’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.

According to the company’s website, “GEO believes that inmates and detainees should be given the greatest opportunity to improve their health and welfare through rehabilitation and educational programs.”

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

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) 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).

For additional information, please contact:

Alex Friedmann, Associate Director
Human Rights Defense Center
Cell: (615) 495-6568
afriedmann@prisonlegalnews.org

David Ganim, Prison Phone Justice Campaign Director
Human Rights Defense Center
Office: (561) 360-2523
dganim@prisonlegalnews.org