

Date of Hearing: June 9, 2026  
Chief Counsel: Andrew Ironside

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY  
Nick Schultz, Chair

SB 498 (Becker) – As Amended April 6, 2026

**SUMMARY:** Expands the list of services a state prison or youth residential placement or detention center operated by the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) is required to provide free of charge to include electronic messaging services; and provides that, if an incarcerated individual is authorized to possess and use a tablet or other device for voice communications, facility staff shall not disconnect any communications conducted by the individual on the device based solely on the duration of the call.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Provides that a state prison or youth residential placement or detention center operated by the CDCR shall provide persons in their custody and confined in a correctional or detention facility with accessible, functional voice communication services free of charge to the person initiating and the person receiving the communication. CDCR shall have operational discretion in implementing this subdivision such that free voice communication services do not interfere with necessary programming. (Pen. Code, § 2084.5, subd. (a).)
- 2) Provides that a state agency shall not receive revenue from the provision of voice communication services or any other communication services to a person confined in a state correctional or detention facility. (Pen. Code, § 2084.5, subd. (b).)
- 3) Requires CDCR facilities to provide incarcerated person telephone for use by an incarcerated persons consistent with their assigned privilege group. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, § 3282, subd. (b).)
- 4) Authorizes incarcerated persons to place telephone calls or device calls to persons outside the facility at designated times and on designated telephones or on authorized wireless communication devices, as set forth in local procedures. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, § 3282, subd. (b).)
- 5) Provides that limitations may be placed on the frequency and length of such calls based on the incarcerated person's privilege group, as specified, and to ensure equal access. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, § 3282, subd. (b).)
- 6) Provides that, except as specified, no limitation shall be placed on the identities or relationships of persons to whom an incarcerated person may place a call, or with whom an incarcerated person conducts electronic communications. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, § 3282, subd. (e).)

- 7) Provides that all incarcerated person calls placed on intrafacility and incarcerated person telephones, and electronic communications may be subject to monitoring and recording at any time. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, § 3282, subd. (f).)
- 8) Provides that all calls made on incarcerated person telephones shall have an announcement before and at random intervals during the calls stating that the call is from an incarcerated person at a California state correctional facility and is being recorded. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, § 3282, subd. (g).)

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown.

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) **Sponsors:** San Quentin Skunkworks, Bridges of Hope CA, Empowering Women Impacted by Incarceration, The Change Parallel Project, Restoring Hope CA, Jesse's Place Organization, Legal Services for Prisoners with Children/All of Us or None, Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice (CURYJ), and Western Center on Law and Poverty.
- 2) **Author's Statement:** According to the author, "The right of an incarcerated individual to communicate with loved ones is fundamental and protected by law. However, the current structure of telecommunications in state correctional facilities prioritizes profits over people despite communication being an essential part of creating an environment for successful reentry. Previous laws enabled money to act as a barrier to reentry services and limited supportive capacities for incarcerated people and their families. My previous legislation, SB 1008, removed the financial burden of traditional phone calls, but families continue to face high per-minute costs for digital communication platforms like video visits and electronic messaging, alongside arbitrary call time limits that disrupt meaningful connection.

"SB 498 directly addresses these remaining gaps. By expanding the state's free communication mandate, this bill ensures that the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation provides both voice and electronic messaging services completely free of charge to both sender and receiver. This bill further changes an outdated regulation requiring facilities to disconnect tablet or voice communications based solely on the duration of the call, ending the practice of cutting off conversations every 15 minutes. By ensuring uninterrupted, cost-free phone and digital messaging, SB 498 enables incarcerated people to reliably connect with their support systems to plan for housing, employment, and successful reintegration without tech barriers punishing families for being poor."

- 3) **Phone Calls by Persons Incarcerated in State Prisons:** Pursuant to the Title 15 Regulations and CDCR's Operations Manual (DOM), inmates are provided with the means and the opportunity to make personal calls to persons outside the institutions. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, § 3282; DOM, § 52060.1.) Each facility is required to provide public telephones for the use of general population inmates to make personal calls. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, § 3282; DOM § 52060.4.) Incarcerated persons may make personal calls to persons outside the institution at designated times and on designated telephones according to their privilege group designation. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 15, § 3282; DOM § 52060.5.) Although limitations are placed on the frequency of calls as to allow equal access to telephones, there are no limitations placed on the numbers, identity, or relationship of the person called, providing the person being called agrees to accept all charges for the call.

(*Ibid.*) Incarcerated persons can sign up to use the telephone in periods of 15-minute increments. (*Ibid.*)

The DOM sets forth eligibility requirements for phone calls based on privilege group as follows:

- Privilege Group A: Telephone calls during the inmate’s non-work/training hours shall be limited only by institution/facility telephone capabilities, and hours of general population unlock.
- Privilege Group B: One personal telephone call period per month.
- Privilege Groups C, D, and U: Telephone calls on an emergency basis only as determined by institution/facility staff.
- Privilege Group DD: Phone privilege suspended during a period of DD. (DOM, § 52060.7.)

According to CDCR, most incarcerated persons have access to telephones and can initiate outgoing collect calls. Prior to January 1, 2023, the Department of General Services (DGS) Inmate/Ward Telephone System (IWTS) within CDCR provided phone calling services through a single state-wide contract held by Global Tel\*Link (GTL), which provided collect-only domestic and international telephone services to incarcerated adults at CDCR facilities.<sup>1</sup> Incarcerated individuals had two options to pay for phone calls via GTL: either prefunded collect or collect. However, SB 1008 (Becker), Chapter 827, Statutes of 2022, required state and local correctional facilities to provide voice communication services to incarcerated persons free of charge. Thus, individuals currently can provide a telephone number where an incarcerated person can call them, and it is up to the incarcerated person to initiate the call. Phone calls are limited to 15 minutes.<sup>2</sup>

This bill would provide that, if an incarcerated individual is authorized to possess and use a tablet or other device for voice communications, facility staff shall not disconnect any communications conducted by the individual on the device based solely on the duration of the call exceeding 15 minutes.

- 4) **Argument in Support:** According to *The Change Parallel Project*, a co-sponsor of the bill, “The 15-minute call limit — now applied even to personal tablets that are never shared and always in the possession of the incarcerated individual — is an outdated policy that disrupts meaningful conversation at the exact moments it matters most. A parent helping a child navigate a hard day. A spouse working through a crisis together. A person in the early, fragile stages of genuine self-reflection. These conversations cannot be sustained in 15-minute windows. When the line cuts off and must be redialed, the moment is lost — and with it, a piece of the relationship.

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<sup>1</sup> CDCR, Receiving Calls from Incarcerated People <<https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/family-resources/receiving-calls-from-incarcerated-people/>> [as of May 29, 2026].

<sup>2</sup> CDCR, How to Contact and Inmate <<https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/family-resources/how-to-contact-an-inmate/>> [as of May 29, 2026].

“The cost of electronic messaging compounds this harm. California took a landmark step with SB 1008 (2022) by making voice calls free. But electronic messaging — the primary mode of everyday communication for most families — still carries fees. These costs fall hardest on low-income families, and disproportionately on Black and Brown communities who are overrepresented among those with incarcerated loved ones. There is no defensible justification for charging families to maintain connection when the Legislature has already affirmed that connection itself should be free.

“Research is clear: incarcerated individuals who maintain strong family relationships are significantly more likely to succeed upon release and less likely to reoffend. The Change Parallel Project has seen this truth lived out in our programming. When someone inside knows they are still known, still loved, and still part of a family, they fight harder to change. SB 498 removes bureaucratic obstacles that stand in the way of that fight.

“SB 498 preserves CDCR’s full operational discretion for safety and security — it simply prevents arbitrary time-based disconnection when no shared resource is being rationed, and prevents families from shouldering the cost of communicating with their incarcerated loved ones. This is sound policy, and it reflects the values California has already committed to.”

- 5) **Argument in Opposition:** No longer applicable.
- 6) **Related Legislation:** AB 1645 (M. Gonzalez) would prohibit CDCR regulations from unreasonably restricting nonsexual physical contact between incarcerated persons and their visitors during contact visits. AB 1645 has been referred to the Senate Public Safety Committee.
- 7) **Prior Legislation:**
  - a) SB 1008 (Becker), Chapter 827, Statutes of 2022, required state and local correctional facilities to provide voice communication services to incarcerated persons free of charge.
  - b) AB 2023 (Bennett), Chapter 327, Statutes of 2022, entitled a person incarcerated in, or recently released from, a county jail to have access to up to three free telephone calls in the county jail to plan for a safe and successful release.
  - c) SB 1139 (Kamlager), Chapter 837, Statutes of 2022, required CDCR to make emergency phone calls available to an incarcerated person and specified people outside of CDCR when the incarcerated person has been hospitalized for a serious medical reason.
  - d) SB 555 (Mitchell), of the 2019-2020 Legislative Session, would have prohibited a county jail from collecting commission fees for providing telephone services to inmates, and would have imposed other restrictions on a county’s ability to contract for commissary and communication services. SB 555 was vetoed by the governor.
  - e) AB 1876 (Quirk), of the 2013-2014 Legislative Session, would have prohibited commissions in telephone service contracts for juvenile facilities and for county, municipal or privately-operated jails, and would have required such contracts to be negotiated and awarded to the lowest cost provider. AB 1876 was held in the Senate

Appropriations Committee.

- f) SB 81 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 175, Statutes of 2007, among other provisions, directed a four-year phase out of concession fees in contracts that provide telephone services to persons incarcerated in state correctional facilities.
- g) AB 230 (Leno), of the 2003-2004 Legislative Session, would have required any contracts to provide phone service to state prisoners and California Youth Authority (CYA) wards to be negotiated to provide the lowest possible costs. AB 230 was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

## **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

### **Support**

Western Center on Law & Poverty, INC. (Co-Sponsor)  
 A New Way of Life Re-entry Project  
 ACLU California Action  
 All of US or None (HQ)  
 Asian Prisoner Support Committee  
 Bridges of Hope CA  
 California Coalition for Women Prisoners  
 California Innocence Coalition  
 California Public Defenders Association  
 Californians United for a Responsible Budget  
 Center for Restorative Justice Works  
 Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice (CURYJ)  
 Courage California  
 Debt Free Justice California  
 Ella Baker Center for Human Rights  
 Empowering Women Impacted by Incarceration  
 Fair Chance Project  
 Felony Murder Elimination Project  
 Fresh Lifelines for Youth  
 Glide  
 Initiate Justice  
 Jesse's Place Organization  
 Justice2jobs Coalition  
 LA Defensa  
 Legal Services for Prisoners With Children  
 Legal Services for Prisoners With Children / All of US or None  
 Peace and Justice Law Center  
 Restoring Hope California  
 San Quentin Skunkworks  
 Showing Up for Racial Justice San Francisco - Surj Sf  
 Smart Justice California, a Project of Beyond Impact  
 The Change Parallel Project  
 The Roots and Wings Project

Youth Leadership Institute  
25 private individuals

**Opposition**

No longer applicable.

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