

Nebraska Prison Inmates to Pay for Legal Phone Calls

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Nebraska Department of Correctional Services

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Inmates at the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) facilities will begin to bear the cost of their legal phone calls effective August 17, 2009. The change is due to the department prevailing in a court ruling in late 2008 (*Nesbitt, et al v. Sprint, et al, 1997*). NDCS Director Robert Houston stated “for the past eleven (11) years the Department has been paying for these phone calls. With this ruling, the public will no longer pay these phone charges.” The time saved by using the ICS will free staff to carry out security supervision, cell searches and attend to other required activities. The Public Counsel (Ombudsman), the Nebraska Center for Public Advocacy (NCPA) and the Nebraska Bar Association provided input to the changes to the inmate phone system process.

Inmates will be allowed sixty (60) minutes each week for calls to legal counsel or the media with this change. They may request that these phone calls be unrecorded. All calls to the Ombudsman’s office will remain unrecorded. Public officials may request unrecorded phone calls by writing a letter to Director Bob Houston. Inmates are allowed fifteen (15) minutes daily for personal phone calls. Personal phone calls are recorded and monitored by correctional staff and law enforcement personnel. NDCS inmates pay the cost of their personal phone calls.

Nebraska inmates pay among the lowest rates for phone calls as compared to inmates incarcerated in federal or other state operated facilities. Nebraska inmates are charged a fifty (50) cent connection fee and, when applicable, five (5) cents per minute for long distance calls. When NDCS inmates make a collect phone call, the receiving party accepting the collect call agrees to pay seventy (70) cents for the connection fee and five (5) cents per minute for a long distance fee, if applicable. Indigent inmates can place “collect” phone calls the same as any other inmate. NDCS does not profit from the charges associated with inmate phone calls. NDCS has worked to maintain low costs to encourage inmate supporters to remain connected with Nebraska inmates.

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