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**SENATE BILL 5231**

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**State of Washington 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Hansen, Frame, Hasegawa, Nobles, Pedersen, Valdez, and C. Wilson

AN ACT Relating to reducing fees and expenses for services for people confined in state facilities; amending RCW 72.09.765; adding a new section to chapter 72.01 RCW; creating a new section; and providing an effective date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 72.01 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The department shall provide persons in its custody and confined in a state facility with voice communication services. The department may supplement voice communication service with other communication services including, but not limited to, video communication and electronic mail or messaging services. To the extent such voice communication service or any other communication service is provided, which shall not be limited beyond program participation and routine facility procedures, each such service shall be provided free of charge to the person initiating and the person receiving the communication. The department shall at least maintain the same access to voice communication services and other communication services in each state facility as the department offered as of January 1, 2025.

(2) The department shall not receive revenue, including any commission or fee, from the provision of voice communication services or any other communication services to any person confined in a state facility.

(3) The department shall not use the provision of voice communication services or any other communication services to persons in its custody and confined in a state facility to supplant in-person contact visits that any such person may be eligible to receive. Communication services shall not be used to replace the in-person visitation program.

(4) The department of corrections shall:

(a) Provide tablets to all persons in its custody at no cost; and

(b) Maintain the same number of voice communication devices, specifically wall phones, in each housing unit as it had on January 1, 2025.

(5) If the department of children, youth, and families provides tablets to persons in its custody, the tablets shall be provided at no cost to the person.

(6) For the purposes of this section:

(a) "Voice communication services" means real-time, audio-only communication services, namely phone calls.

(b) "Other communication services" means communication services other than voice communications including, but not limited to, video communication and electronic mail or messaging services.

(c) "Confined" or "confinement" means incarcerated or detained in a correctional institution as defined in RCW 9.94.049 under the custody of the department of corrections or department of children, youth, and families.

(d) "Department" means the department of corrections and department of children, youth, and families.

**Sec.**  RCW 72.09.765 and 2020 c 319 s 4 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Any contract to provide ((~~inmates~~)) incarcerated individuals with ((~~access to~~)) telecommunication services and electronic media services in state correctional facilities shall be made publicly available and posted on the department's website.

(2) The information in this subsection from the contract shall be prominently displayed on the department's public website, posted prominently in housing units, and made available on tablets:

(a) Rates for ((~~facilitating telecommunication services including, but not limited to, phone calls, video visitation, videograms and video clips, emails, and accessing music and entertainment~~)) all products and services covered by the contract, with a detailed breakdown that includes taxes, surcharges, fees, and any other fees;

(b) Fees charged for money transfers and transactions, maintenance of financial accounts, and any other fee charged to the user to facilitate the money transfer or online deposit account; and

(c) All fees or costs charged to the ((~~inmate~~)) incarcerated individual or customer in exchange for use of ((~~telecommunication or~~)) electronic media services through the contract.

(3) By July 1st of each year, the contractor that provides ((~~inmates~~)) incarcerated individuals with ((~~access to~~)) telecommunication services and electronic media services under subsection (1) of this section shall report to the department the following information:

(a) A summary of services offered at each correctional facility;

(b) Rates charged for, or associated with, providing each type of service including, but not limited to, monthly financial account maintenance fees, transaction fees associated with money transfers, ((~~per call and connection surcharges,~~)) bill statement fees, and refund fees;

(c) ((~~A total accounting of commissions provided to the department or correctional facility;~~

~~(d)~~)) A detailed summary and accounting of services used by ((~~inmates~~)) incarcerated individuals categorized as indigent;

(d) Data on usage of all telecommunications and electronic media services under the contract, including monthly call and message volume;

(e) One-time and ongoing costs incurred for installing and maintaining hardware;

(f) Average customer service response time rates per facility and the average time taken to resolve an issue or provide a refund for defective services; and

(g) An accounting of all revenues or losses incurred by the contractor by quarter.

(4) By November 1st of each year, and in compliance with RCW 43.01.036, the department shall report to the governor and legislature on contracts for telecommunication services and electronic media services under this section and the contractor's annual compliance with this section.

(5) This section applies to any contract in effect on June 11, 2020, and to any renegotiation, renewal, or extension of such contract.

(6) For the purposes of this section:

(a) "Telecommunications services" include, but are not limited to, voice communication services, video communication services, videograms, and electronic mail or messaging services.

(b) "Electronic media services" include, but are not limited to, video clips, music, and entertainment.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  This act may be known and cited as the connecting families act.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  This act takes effect December 1, 2025.

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