

1 H.294

2 An act relating to telecommunications services and wages in correctional
3 facilities

4 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

5 Sec. 1. INTENT

6 It is the intent of the General Assembly to:

7 (1) create conditions of incarceration that encourage the development
8 and maintenance of the personal supports necessary for rehabilitation;

9 (2) mitigate the disruptions to family and community connections
10 caused by incarceration by reducing communication barriers;

11 (3) divest the State from the for-profit prison industry; and

12 (4) inform State correctional policy decision making with data, fiscal
13 analysis, and agency expertise.

14 Sec. 2. DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS; EVALUATION OF
15 TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES; REPORT

16 (a) On or before December 1, 2026, the Department of Corrections shall
17 provide to the House Committee on Corrections and Institutions and the Senate
18 Committee on Institutions a written report evaluating options for providing no-
19 cost telecommunications services to inmates in the Department's custody that:

20 (1) describes the current telecommunications service model, including
21 usage rates, costs, and contract terms under existing provider arrangements;

1 (2) describes alternative options for providing telecommunications
2 services, including through nonprofit providers or as a regulated public utility;

3 (3) analyzes the cost to the State of each alternative, including:

4 (A) start-up and transition costs, both with and without Wi-Fi;

5 (B) ongoing operational and administrative costs;

6 (C) cost comparisons to the current model;

7 (D) impacts on Department budgets;

8 (E) anticipated changes in service usage and volume; and

9 (F) any anticipated benefits or savings, including reasonably
10 ascertainable impacts on behavior, security, safety, and an incarcerated
11 person's ability to sustain support systems; and

12 (4) identifies implementation, operational, and transition considerations
13 for each alternative, including:

14 (A) administrative, technological, and contractual requirements;

15 (B) operational changes;

16 (C) implementation timeline; and

17 (D) any required statutory, regulatory, or policy updates.

18 (b) In conducting its evaluation of options for providing no-cost
19 telecommunications services, the Department of Corrections shall, when
20 practicable, consult with the following stakeholders:

- 1 (1) the Public Utility Commission;
2 (2) the Joint Fiscal Office;
3 (3) one or more nonprofit providers of corrections telecommunications
4 services with operational experience;
5 (4) incarcerated Vermonters, formerly incarcerated Vermonters, and
6 organizations representing incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals;
7 (5) representatives of families of incarcerated Vermonters or
8 organizations representing families of incarcerated Vermonters;
9 (6) community-based reentry service providers;
10 (7) justice reform organizations;
11 (8) the Prison Research and Innovation Network (PRIN); and
12 (9) any other stakeholders or subject matter experts identified by the
13 Commissioner of Corrections as necessary for the evaluation.

14 (c) The Department of Corrections shall provide to the Joint Legislative
15 Justice Oversight Committee for the Committee's analysis and input:

- 16 (1) a first draft of the report on or before September 15, 2026; and
17 (2) an updated draft of the report on or before November 15, 2026.

18 Sec. 3. DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS; WAGE IMPACT
19 EVALUATION; REPORT

20 On or before December 1, 2026, the Department of Corrections shall
21 provide to the House Committee on Corrections and Institutions and the Senate

1 Committee on Institutions a written report evaluating the impacts of current
2 wages for inmates in the Department's custody that:

3 (1) collects and analyzes the current wage levels for inmates;

4 (2) identifies the categories of labor performed by inmates that would
5 otherwise be performed by the State and estimates the cost to the State of
6 providing the same services through State employees or contracted vendors,
7 including wage and benefit costs;

8 (3) compares different wage impact scenarios and estimates the impact
9 of wage adequacy improvements on outcomes for inmates, such as
10 maintenance of family contacts, compliance with restitution and support
11 obligations, reentry success, and participation in facility work programs; and

12 (4) assesses the relationship between current wage levels and the ability
13 of work program participants to purchase telecommunications services and
14 commissary items.

15 Sec. 4. EFFECTIVE DATE

16 This act shall take effect on passage.