# MEDIA ALERT

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**Restore Justice Celebrates Unanimous Passage of Bill to Protect Affordable Communication in Prison**

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Restore Justice applauds Illinois lawmakers for unanimously passing House Bill 4235, which would protect affordable communication between people who are incarcerated and their loved ones on the outside. The Illinois Senate passed House Bill 4235 on May 21, 2026. The bill previously passed the House with unanimous support. The legislation now heads to Governor JB Pritzker's desk.

If signed into law, House Bill 4235 would:

- Prohibit any additional fees for sending or receiving mail, preserving access to mail at the standard postage rate for people who are incarcerated and their loved ones.
- Prevent the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) from generating revenue from communication services between people who are incarcerated and their loved ones.
- Ensure postage stamps and mailing supplies are sold at cost in the IDOC.
- Require public, annual reports from IDOC on communication contracts spending and rates.

Representative Rita Mayfield and Senator Elgie R. Sims, Jr. sponsored the measure.

"The justice system must place rehabilitation, not financial gain, at the forefront," said **State Senator Elgie R. Sims, Jr.** (D-Chicago). "This is a compassionate, common-sense step we can take now to ensure the new system does not hold people's human connections above their head for a price."

"Incarcerated people and their families are already dealing with stress and hardship that many of us cannot even imagine," said **State Representative Rita Mayfield** (D-Waukegan). "They are going through some of the hardest times in their lives, and they are far away from their support systems. With this legislation, we're simply ensuring that they are able to communicate with friends and family back home without having to deal with unnecessary fees complicating things even further."

This legislation comes after the IDOC implemented statewide mail scanning in 2025, despite a lack of evidence that mail scanning provides institutional safety benefits. In other states that use mail scanning, people who are incarcerated and their loved ones often face additional charges for receiving and sending mail and photographs.

Preserving affordable communication is important because decades of academic research indicate that family contact is one of the strongest predictors of successful rehabilitation and lowers the likelihood that people will return to prison.

Families already spend thousands of dollars each year on phone calls, electronic messaging, travel for visits, and commissary to stay in touch with and provide support for their incarcerated loved ones. For most people, mail is the most reliable and cost-effective way to stay connected.

“House Bill 4235 protects Illinois families from extra costs and fees simply to stay in contact with their loved ones in prison, maintaining vital emotional support that provides a crucial lifeline and hope for the future,” said **James Swansey**, Policy Director at Restore Justice.

Right now, people who are incarcerated and their loved ones do not pay additional fees to send or receive mail; IDOC does not profit from communication services. House Bill 4235 would preserve those policies moving forward and prevent new financial barriers that could undermine family connections.

Restore Justice thanks Senator Elgie Sims and Representative Rita Mayfield for championing this bill, as well as the legislators, stakeholders, advocates, families, and directly impacted people who supported the legislation.

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*Restore Justice, which comprises Restore Justice Foundation and Restore Justice Illinois, works to address issues faced by those serving life or de-facto life sentences, their families, and their communities. Founded in 2015 by a dedicated group of advocates that included the late former Congressman, Federal Judge, and White House Counsel Abner Mikva, Restore Justice trains and supports advocates, conducts research, nurtures partnerships, and develops policy solutions that will roll back ineffective “tough on crime” policies of the past, replacing them with compassionate, smart, and safe policies for the future.*