
**Criminal Justice & Corrections
Committee**

HB 2950

Brief Description: Prescribing guidelines for contracts for telecommunications services in correctional institutions.

Sponsors: Representatives Darneille, Delvin, Flannigan, Hankins, Veloria, Kagi, McDonald, Pettigrew, O'Brien and Morrell.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Provides that a contract to provide inmates with telephone services in a Department of Corrections (DOC) operated facility may not include a commission to the department based upon amounts billed by the telecommunications provider for telephone calls made by inmates.

Hearing Date: 2/4/04

Staff: Yvonne Walker (786-7841).

Background:

The DOC contracts for the equipment installation, maintenance and local long-distance telephone service at each prison. In return for the right to provide each prison with phone service, each contractor provides a rebate to the DOC on a monthly basis. The rebate is based on a rate determined between the department and the contractors. The rebates are deposited in the Offender Betterment Fund at each facility where the service is provided. Twenty-five percent of all funds in the Offender Betterment Fund are transferred to the Department of Labor and Industries for providing benefits to crime victims through the Crime Victim Compensation Program. The remaining funds are used for general prison related expenses.

Inmates in prison must use *operator-assisted* collect telephone calls and may not directly dial to another party. Operator-assisted telephone calls carry the highest rate, regardless of who makes the call. For security reasons, the DOC has set the policy that inmates may not dial directly to outside parties. Prison personnel and people on the outside of prison have access to telephones that allow for direct dialing which carries a lower rate. Consequently, it is not the rate per se that results in a higher cost to individuals accepting inmates collect calls but that the collect call must be operator-assisted.

In 2003, the Legislature passed legislation (ESSB5404, the Operating Budget) that requires the DOC, when contracts are established or renewed for offender telephone services, to select contractors based on (1) the lowest rate charged to both the inmate and the person paying for the telephone call, and (2) the lowest commission rates paid to the DOC, while providing reasonable compensation to cover the costs associated with providing telephone service to inmates and providing sufficient revenues for the activities funded from the Offender Betterment Fund.

Summary of Bill:

A contract to provide inmates with telephone services in a DOC operated facility may not include a commission or any other payment to the department based upon amounts billed by the telecommunications provider for telephone calls made by inmates. This requirement only applies to phone service contracts that are renegotiated, renewed, or extended after the effective date of this act.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 3, 2004.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.