



STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
**FREDERICK P. KESSLER**

WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY

12TH DISTRICT

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**For Further Information Contact:**

June 5, 2007

Representative Frederick P. Kessler  
608.266.5813

## **Rates for Inmate Phone Calls Unfair**

*Legislation to advocate reasonable phone charges to inmates*

MADISON - State Representatives Frederick P. Kessler (D-Milwaukee), Jason Fields (D-Milwaukee), Tamara Grigsby (D-Milwaukee), Robert Turner (D-Racine), Annette Williams (D-Milwaukee), Leon Young (D-Milwaukee) last week introduced a bill to prohibit telephone charges to an inmate held in a jail or correctional facility. The proposal's phone charges may not exceed the charges made by a person incarcerated in a state prison.

In 2007, in the House of Corrections and the Milwaukee County Criminal Justice Facility, the rate of \$3.30 for a fifteen minute call increased by nearly 70% to \$5.55. Some families received bills that exceeded to hundreds of dollars per month; if a prisoner called home for an hour every day, the cost for a week would be over \$150.00.

According to the Milwaukee County Executive 2007 Budget, the revenue for telephone calls placed by inmates in the Criminal Justice Facility increased by \$310,272, from \$818,928 in 2006 to \$1,129,200. The increased revenue was offset by increase expenditures of \$170,000 for debit phone cards for resale to the inmates. Milwaukee County retains over 51% of the profits from the calls.

Collect calls from inmates to their families and attorneys remain much higher than those at the state level. The state charges a rate of \$1.25 for the first minute and \$0.22 for each additional minute with no time limit. The state of Wisconsin places ninth in the nation for the lowest rates. The rate discrepancy between the state and county remains disproportionate and excessive. "Punishing prisoner's families by charging high costs is just not fair," Representative Kessler said.

The issue captured the attention of legislators nation-wide including the states of Illinois, Pennsylvania, New York, and Wisconsin, calling for immediate reform. Currently, the charges vary by county, but particular counties, such as Milwaukee County, bear a heavy fiscal burden for families of inmates. Most prisoners receive little to no income, thereby shifting the responsibility of these costs on their family.

Families of inmates have to make heartbreaking decisions of whether or not to answer the telephone due to the prices of these calls. Phone bills that amount up to hundreds of dollars per month force choices of either accepting the charges of these calls or buying necessities. Most of the inmates come from poverty level families which cannot afford these rates. A result of these higher costs makes inmates and families members less likely to talk, and therefore losing outside communication to loved ones.

"I believe the hardship to an inmate's family should not be compounded by placing the added burden of having to choose between paying exorbitant phone rates to hear from a loved one, or making the difficult decision to not accept the phone call" Representative Kessler articulated.

###