



MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

KEEPING THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN

The Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) recognizes the important role staying in contact with family and friends plays in the overall wellness of offenders while incarcerated, and their successful return to their communities.

COMMUNICATION OPTIONS:

- Mail
- Email
- Phone calls
- Video visitation
- In-person visitation

OVERVIEW

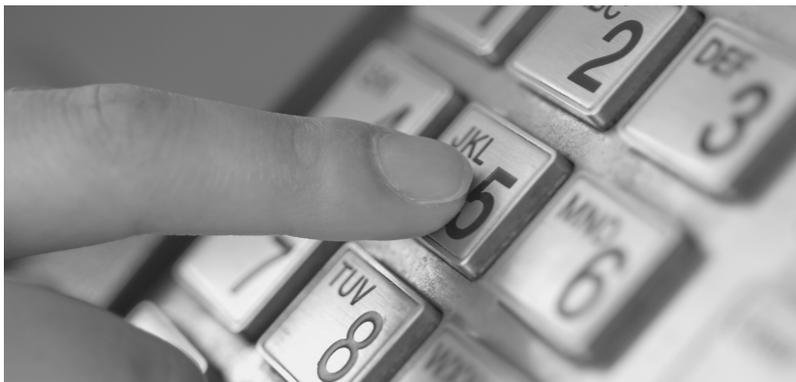
Mail – arrives at, and leaves, facilities via regular mail service. Cost associated with the service is the price of a stamp – a rate set by the U.S. Postal Service. Restrictions exist for what items may be received or sent from facilities and mail is closely monitored by mailroom staff for contraband. For example, postage stamps are a method used to deliver drugs into facilities. As a result, stamps are now prohibited, and pre-paid envelopes must be used to send mail correspondence to secure facilities. Legal correspondence also arrives at the facilities through regular mail service and the DOC has specific processes in place to preserve client/attorney privilege and maintain security at the facilities. For example, incoming legal mail is opened in the presence of the offender and inspected for contraband before offenders take possession. **Staff members do not read legal mail.** Indigent offenders at DOC facilities are provided with five stamped envelopes every month for personal use or legal mailings.

Email – The cost for this service – between 31 and 33 cents per email - is paid by the family member or friend. Email users may buy email credits at the rate of \$10 for 30 credits or \$25 for 80 credits. Each credit authorizes one email correspondence up to 2,000 characters. To use this method of communication, offenders send an invitation to the individual with whom they want to communicate; that person may accept or decline the invitation. Emails are closely monitored to identify any suspicious or illegal activity.

Phone calls – are made by offenders from kiosks inside the facilities. Fees related to that communication are assumed by the family or friends who receive the calls at the rate of 10 cents per minute. Calls are randomly monitored by staff members in an effort to prevent criminal activity. Calls are also recorded.

Video visitation – is scheduled online by family and friends. Offenders join the video visitations from kiosks located within the living units at the prison. The family/friends assume the cost of \$4.00 for a 25-minute visit. These visits are randomly monitored and are recorded.

Inmates receive one free phone call and video visitation every month.



BACKGROUND

2016 - DOC advertised for bids from contractors to provide offender telephone and related services.

HB 426 – 2017 legislation requiring state prisons who contract for telecommunications services, to the extent feasible, to contract with providers that do not charge excessive intrastate fees of greater than 10 cents a minute.

The department required respondents to the request for proposals to include phones, video visitation, tablets

with educational materials, and the option to add inmate email. Also, included in the contract was a requirement to install the infrastructure for all telephonic and data transmission at the facilities.

CenturyLink, which was acquired by IC Solutions, was the successful candidate as it offered the lowest rates for the services required by the DOC.

The current calling rate is .10 cents/minute.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why aren't all communication options available at all facilities at which DOC offenders are held?

The department's goal is to ensure similar communication opportunities for offenders across all facilities, including DOC-contracted facilities. As part of that effort, the DOC stays informed about the latest advances in technology and continually investigates how it might better help offenders to maintain connections in the community. Some barriers presented to the department in providing communications opportunities include limited ability of infrastructure at facilities to support all mediums of communication, and security requirements. In terms of DOC-contracted facilities, the same limitations apply, in addition to the fact many DOC-contract facilities work with alternate service providers with varying contractual considerations.

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COR.MT.GOV.**

Why doesn't the DOC provide communication to offenders and their family/friends for free?

The DOC is not budgeted to provide these services. Also, the DOC is not aware of any correctional system in the country that provides inmate communications free to inmates, families, and friends. Should the Montana Legislature decide fees associated with inmate communication should be assumed by the state, the DOC has three options.

- *Continue working with its current provider with an appropriation to cover the costs.*
- *Request an appropriation for costs associated with having the Montana Department of Administration install the infrastructure and services. That appropriation would also need to address usage of the services by offenders and their friends/family.*
- *Issue an RFP for a new provider to install the entire communications network and perform maintenance on it. In addition, the contractor would be required to manage all call screening, number blocking, call recording, analytics and more. This would require an appropriation to cover the costs.*

Why do inmates and their family/friends need to pay for email when services like Gmail and Yahoo don't have an associated cost?

Costs associated with inmate email allow the contractor who provides the service to recover the initial cost of developing secure email software for use in a correctional environment and to offset ongoing costs including storage, processing and management of the email functionality. In addition, the DOC's contract with its contractor does not allow for the department to contract for services, like electronic messages, with other vendors using the infrastructure the current contractor installed and services. Free email services for the general public (Gmail, Yahoo, etc.) address their costs by selling advertisements on the platform. This is not an option for offender email for security reasons. Also, many email services charge an additional fee for storage once a certain limit has been reached.