

July 20, 2010

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia: Mr. Speaker, the Cell Phone Contraband Act of 2010 will address an ongoing problem of cell phones being smuggled into prisons by visitors and prison guards. Prison inmate cell phone accessibility has resulted in offenders facilitating and committing crimes with the use of the cell phones. Gangs have also become far more organized because members in prison have cell phone access.

S. 1749 amends Federal law to make cell phones and similar devices contraband that Federal prisoners are prohibited from possessing. Some have argued that cell phone smuggling is a direct reaction to the outrageous costs inmates and their families pay for telephone calls while a person is incarcerated. Prisons and jails require that inmates call their families collect or pay for calls with their prison accounts. And, indeed, phone companies charge much more for calls from prisons than they charge for calls made from outside prison. For example, one organization found that a 15-minute collect call made from San Quentin Prison to Oakland, both in California, would cost \$5; whereas, the same collect call made from outside the prison would be about \$2.55. That's for a collect call. It would be even cheaper if a reliable way were established for inmates to pay for their own calls.

S. 1749 requires the GAO to study the issue of exorbitant prison telephone rates and the gulf between those rates as the first step to finally bringing those rates down to reasonable levels so that inmates and their families have a much easier time staying in touch. In addition, the study will look at State and Federal efforts to prevent smuggling of cell phones into prisons and jails.

Although we should not allow prisoners to have access to cell phones while incarcerated, it is appropriate to provide them with telephone service at reasonable rates in order for them to maintain ties with their families and children.

I urge my colleagues to support this important legislation.