



BARBALUNGA FOR SHERIFF

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“Time For Change – Justice That Works”

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Barbalunga Urges Neal To Support Prison Phone Justice Act

BERKSHIRE COUNTY— Alf Barbalunga, the Chief Probation Officer who is running for Berkshire County Sheriff, has written to U.S. Congressman Richard Neal (D-MA) urging him to sponsor and urge his colleagues in the House to pass H.R. 2489, The **Martha Wright Prison Phone Justice Act**, legislation that will give the Federal Communications Commission greater authority to regulate predatory prison and jail telecom corporations, and to urge his House colleagues to cosponsor this bill.



“I am a candidate for Berkshire County Sheriff in the September 6th Democratic Primary.” Barbalunga wrote. “I believe that a Sheriff should advocate on behalf of inmates and their families. I am concerned that the high cost of phone calls for inmates--which are often paid for by their families---hinders them from communicating on a regular basis.”

“Berkshire County historically has had some of the highest phone call rates in Massachusetts. Prison phone corporations have charged as much as \$6 for a 15-minute phone call between an incarcerated person and their loved ones. They are extracting wealth from inmate families, and forcing some to choose between putting food on the table and

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staying connected with a loved one behind bars. H.R. 2489 establishes requirements related to certain charges, practices, classifications, or regulations in connection with jail or prison communications services. It requires the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to establish maximum rates and charges that a provider of prison communications services may charge for such services. The bill provides interim rate caps until the FCC establishes such rates and charges.

The bill requires a provider of prison communications services to assess all charges for communications on a per-minute basis for the actual duration of the communication, and it prohibits a provider from charging a per-communication or per-connection charge. A provider also may not charge an ancillary service charge except in certain circumstances.

It also prohibits a provider from assessing a site commission, which is a payment or donation made to certain entities that operate or oversee a confinement facility.”

Barbalunga says the Commonwealth has been working to lower the cost of inmate phone calls, but he would like the state to investigate the options for using free, internet-based platforms to allow inmates and families to stay better connected. “We have e-communication platforms today that we didn’t have even 5 years ago. Jails in the 21st Century can rise to this challenge.”

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