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Sheriff's Office made half a million dollars from inmate phone calls in 2011 *by [Gregg](#)*

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One of the key issues to be discussed in the upcoming Fairfax County Sheriff's race in November might be the fact that the Sheriff's Office profits from the inmate population at the Fairfax County Adult Detention Center by receiving significant revenues from prepaid phone cards and phone services sold to prisoners.

On the Fairfax County Adult Detention Center's website, it states that inmates "may call free of charge to their attorneys, probation and parole officers, bonding agents and some community agencies" but "all personal calls, whether local or long distance, must be collect calls."

Friends and family of inmates are able to establish prepaid collect accounts online to receive calls from inmates. The addition of funds to inmate accounts by friends or family can also be made online, the website states.

Current Fairfax County Sheriff Mark Sites is well acquainted with the current inmate phone services contract. His name is listed as a contact person on the original 2008 Request for Proposal that garnered San Antonio-based communications company IC Solutions the inmate phone services contract with the Sheriff's Office.

"I was a second lieutenant in the budget section at that time and I aided with that RFP," he said. The contract has been extended since that original contract, according to the Sheriff's Office.

Sites recently defended the program during a debate he had with current Democratic nominee for sheriff Stacy Kincaid late last month.

"The profits from that program are used to purchase capital equipment such as appliances and laundry equipment for the inmates," he said. "It goes back into infrastructure improvements that benefit the inmates."

Kincaid stated publicly that she sought to eliminate the profit element of the program.

"The department should not be profiting from the inmate population," she said during the July 16 Democratic nominee debate. Calls to Kincaid seeking additional comment on the issue were not returned.

According to records obtained from the office's financial services branch, in 2011 — the last year for which figures are available — the Sheriff's Office brought in \$612,000 in gross telephone receipts from its inmate telephone services program, which sells inmates prepaid phone cards in \$10 or \$20 increments. But those amounts don't last very long when inmates use their cards to make calls.

According to documents provided by the Fairfax County Sheriff's Office Financial Services Branch Chief Ray A. Vanneman, inmates can be charged as much as \$5.31 for the first minute of a collect, or prepaid collect, call made to an out-of-state phone number. Each additional minute is charged at a rate of 89 cents. With a yearly population of about 25,000 at the detention center, profits quickly add up.

"[In 2011] Our expense for the phone system was \$41,190, so the net revenue after phone system expenses was \$571,218.63," said Vanneman.

That figure represents a 93 percent commission rate, possibly the highest in the country, according to prison phone services specialist Christina Mansfield of the nonprofit group Community Initiative for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement, based in San Francisco. The group tracks down, compares and analyzes inmate phone service contracts nationwide.

"The highest commission rate in the country that we currently know of is 84.1 percent in Baldwin County, Ala.," she said. "It also is contracted through IC Solutions."

Mansfield also said that the phone rates for Fairfax inmates are extremely high.

"If correct, they are about as egregious as it gets," she said. "We have seen rates as high as a \$3.55 surcharge and 55 cents per minute for interstate calls, but never over \$4 for a surcharge or 89 cents per additional minute."

"The program is authorized by the state, audited by the state annually for appropriateness in funds handling and appropriateness of expenses, and collected in all 48 jails in Virginia," said Sheriff's Office spokesman Steve Elbert. "All the funds are reserved for direct support of the sheriff operations and direct or indirect support of inmates ... those costs will not go away, even if these funds were not collected. An alternative revenue [source] would be needed."

Calls made to IC Solutions were not returned. Calls made to the Virginia Department of Corrections seeking annual figures for statewide profits stemming from inmate phone service programs were also not returned, but according to a 2008 study performed by the correctional facility watchdog organization Prison Legal News, all Virginia correctional facility commissions directly obtained from prison phone revenues that year totaled \$4.82 million.

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