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September 13, 2022

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: RECOMMENDED VETO OF SB 1008 (BECKER, J)

Dear Governor Newsom:

I respectfully request a veto of Senate Bill 1008, which passed the Assembly on 8/30/22 by a vote of 56 to 16, with 16 members of the Assembly Republican Caucus voting "No."

SB 1008 requires a correctional facility operated by the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to provide inmates, free of charge, voice communication services. It provides that the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation has operational discretion in implementing the bill's requirement so that free voice communication services do not interfere with necessary programming. It includes equivalent provisions applicable to local youth residential detention centers.

While it is appropriate to encourage prisons to seek less expensive communication options for inmates, such as voice over internet services, this bill will create an expensive entitlement. The Assembly Appropriations Committee estimates that this will cost "millions of dollars." It will shift costs onto the taxpayers that ought to be borne by inmates and/or by their families. While amendments to the bill removed the prior entitlement to 60 minutes of calls per day, it remains an expensive entitlement to provide free calling services.

The provision stating that the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation "shall have operational discretion in implementing [the bill] such that free voice communication services do not interfere with necessary programming" does not clearly give the Department authority to deny inmates the ability to make international or high cost toll calls. The bill's entitlement is also not limited to calls to family members.

The state should encourage prison inmates to maintain contact with loved ones. However, this bill creates an entitlement that is not available to law-abiding Californians who also struggle to pay for telephone and other voice communication services. The Department should search for low-cost ways to encourage inmates to maintain contact, including voice communication, with family members without creating an inflexible, overgenerous entitlement.

For the reasons stated above, I respectfully request that you veto Senate Bill 1008.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "James Gallagher".

James Gallagher
Assembly Republican Leader