

## Bell Canada Faces Class Action Over 'Exorbitant' Fees for Prison Calls

A newly lodged Bell Canada prison calls class action lawsuit claims the phone company charged excessive fees for calls in and out of prisons.

According to the lead plaintiff, and Ontario resident represented by Sotos Class Actions, Bell Canada is the sole provider of telephone services in correctional facilities in the province. The Bell prison calls class action lawsuit alleges that since 2013 the company has been charging "unconscionable telephone service rates" for incoming and outgoing calls to the correctional facilities.

The plaintiff says that he was incarcerated in several Ontario correctional facilities and that his family could not afford to receive calls from him due to the fees charged by Bell Canada. In addition, his access to legal services were also limited by Bell's phone fees.

"Taking advantage of its exclusive control over the [Offender Telephone Management System], Bell gave Ontario Prisoners one option, and one option only: place collect calls to landlines at exorbitant and improvident prices extracted from anyone who had to accept the calls," alleges the Bell prison calls class action.

The plaintiff further claims that Bell Canada falsely represented its rates to those who called from Ontario correctional facilities. The class action lawsuit alleges that Bell represented to incarcerated people and their families that call rates would be no higher than regular residential rates. However, according to the complaint, one 20-minute call could cost over \$30. Calls out of the facilities are allegedly required to be collect calls, so prisoners' families and loved ones are often stuck with the bill.

"Making prisoners' phone calls to the outside world prohibitively expensive puts a financial and emotional strain on the prisoners and their families," stated the lawyer for the plaintiff, according to Cision. "It is grossly unfair because it isolates prisoners, inhibits rehabilitation and contributes to anxiety and depression. Bell Canada's commitment to promoting awareness of mental health issues rings hollow in light of this practice"

According to the class action lawsuit, mental illness rates for those in correctional facilities is much higher than suffered by members of the general population. The high rate of mental illness makes communication with friends and family members of vital importance to incarcerated people.

The Bell Canada prisoner calls class action lawsuit seeks to represent current and former incarcerated people who made collect calls from an Ontario correctional facility, as well as the people who accepted and paid for those calls.

The plaintiff is seeking compensation for the allegedly exorbitant call rates charged by Bell Canada, including \$1.52 million in general and statutory damages and \$10 million in punitive, exemplary, and aggravated damages.

The proposed Bell Canada prisoner calls class action lawsuit was filed on Feb. 5, 2020 and will need to be certified by the court to proceed.

*Did you make or accept a collect call from an Ontario correctional facility? Did you find the charges excessive? Tell us your story in the comments below.*

The plaintiff and proposed Class are represented by Mohsen Seddigh and Tassia K. Poynter of Sotos LLP.

The Bell Canada Prison Calls Class Action Lawsuit is *John Doe v. Bell Canada*, Case No. CV-20-00635778-00CP, in the Ontario Superior Court of Justice, Canada.

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