

## **MEDIA RELEASE: Too many incarcerated parents can't afford to speak to their families this Mother's Day**

13 May 2024

On Mother's Day, a coalition of community, legal, and social services working with or on behalf of people in prison and their families have written to the Treasurer, the Minister for Corrections, and the Minister for Children to call on the Victorian government to fully fund the cost of making phone calls from prison.

The joint letter (attached) expresses the coalition's disappointment that, despite recent commitments from the Allan government in response to the Yoorrook Justice Commission, there has been no funding in this year's Victorian Budget to subsidise the cost of phone calls from prison. The cost of a 12-minute phone call (the maximum duration that is allowed) from a Victorian prison to a mobile phone is currently nearly \$7. This is substantially higher than other states and territories in Australia. People in prison only earn between \$3.55 and \$9.60 per day for the work they do, and they must budget for items from the canteen and other expenses alongside the high cost of phone calls to their children and families. These costs create an unacceptably high barrier to contact between people in prison and their families, including children who have a right to contact with their parents, and damage people's prospects for successful reintegration into their community post-release. There are an estimated 7,000 Victorian children with a parent in prison at any one time.

Corrections Victoria's contract with its prison telecommunications provider, Comsec TR, expires in 2025. The letter urges the Victorian government to cease its contract with private providers such as Comsec TR and instead assume the responsibility and cost for the prison phone system. Comsec TR also provides prison telecommunications in other states and territories, including Tasmania where phone calls to mobile phones from prison are 37% cheaper. If the contract with Comsec TR continues, the coalition asks that its re-negotiation results in a substantial decrease and/or subsidisation of the cost of phone calls for people in prison.

*Please direct media enquiries to Abigail Lewis, Senior Policy & Advocacy Advisor at Vacro, at [alewis@vacro.org.au](mailto:alewis@vacro.org.au) or 0468 566 218. Interviews are available with representatives from the letter's signatories, with the Chair of the Inquiry into Children Affected by Parental Incarceration (former MP Fiona Patten), and with a formerly incarcerated mother with lived experience of this issue. Anonymised quotes are also available from a currently incarcerated mother.*