



## **LOW-INCOME FAMILIES PAY THE HIGHEST COST**

**Each of the 23 Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) prisons currently gives a monopoly contract to one vending machine company. Visitors experience high prices, poor quality, and no consistency across facilities.**

### **Why this is a Problem:**

**Nearly two out of every three families with an incarcerated member are unable to meet their family's basic needs**, according to an Ella Baker Center for Human Rights study. Almost half of these families struggle with meeting basic food needs, and these financial burdens make it difficult for families to visit prison.

Visits are critical for both inmates and their loved ones. More than 62% of inmates have at least one child, according to IDOC. **Children perform better in school and have fewer behavioral problems when they are able to visit the parent** (Children's Contact With Their Incarcerated Parents, National Institutes of Health).

**Visits are key to good behavior, rehabilitation, re-entry, and family stability** (Prison Policy Initiative, 2015; the Minnesota Department of Corrections, 2011; Karen De Claire and Louise Dixon, 2011).

Visitors cannot bring in outside food or beverages. They must use vending machines, even for water. Here are specific complaints Restore Justice staff have received or experienced firsthand:

- Stale and moldy food has been left in machines, discovered after people started eating it.
- There are no options for people with dietary restrictions, such as kosher or halal.
- All of the beverage machines were broken at Hill Correctional Center on Thanksgiving weekend, 2020, and families lost money before the problem was discovered.
- People who deserve refunds don't receive them or responses. One person put \$20 on a card but it didn't register. They emailed for a refund but never heard back.
- "The last time I went (on 2/12), there were only 3 of the 7 machines working. And one machine was only about 25% full." - Illinois River Correctional Center visitor
- The "machines (were) almost empty, (and) one (was) out of service." - Stateville Correctional Center visitor in January 2020
- Inmates may miss one or two meals to accept a visit.

### **Solution:**

**HB 3986 would create competition for vending machine contracts, improve quality, and reduce the cost of food in IDOC visiting rooms.**

Each facility would award two contracts, including one to a vendor that employs people who are legally blind.

**Overview:**

Restore Justice Illinois developed HB 3986 with the family members of people who are incarcerated, specifically a group called Communities & Relatives of Illinois Incarcerated Children (CRIIC). CRIIC brings together family members and other loved ones of people who receive(d) extreme sentences as children, in addition to relatives of other incarcerated people. The group meets monthly so members can discuss their experiences.

In addition to sharing the collective experience of the Restore Justice Illinois and CRIIC teams at more than six Illinois Department of Corrections' prisons, we have received the following complaints from people around the state:

- Stale and moldy food (both meal items and candy) have been left in machines, discovered after people started eating it.
- There are no options for people with dietary restrictions, such as kosher or halal.
- There are no healthy options.
- People who deserve refunds don't receive them or responses. One person put \$20 on a card at Hill but it didn't register. They emailed for a refund but never heard back.
- All of the beverage machines were broken at Hill Correctional Center on Thanksgiving weekend, 2020, and families lost money before the problem was discovered.
- Hill has six machines, and on most visits, between two and four of them are not working.
- "The last time I went (on 2/12), there were only 3 of the 7 machines working. And one machine was only about 25% full." - Illinois River Correctional Center visitor
- Illinois River's coffee machine hasn't had cups in about 6 months.
- Machines at Illinois River were about 90 percent empty after the first visiting shift on 2/27. After that shift, there were no chips, pizzas, or burgers.
- On February 27, 2020, Illinois River ran out of plastic utensils, even though prison staff had cautioned about the shortage.
- On February 20, 2020, all of the Illinois River machines were "practically empty."
- The "machines (were) almost empty, (and) one (was) out of service." - Stateville Correctional Center visitor in January 2020
- The microwaves at Menard Correctional Center were broken on one visitor's recent trip, so food could not be heated.
- Shawnee Correctional Center was out of plastic utensils and paper towels, so people had to heat food up on toilet paper and eat with their hands.
- At Western Illinois Correctional Center, one or two machines usually don't accept working cards.



**HB 3986**

**House Sponsor:** Representative Kelly Cassidy (D)

**Supporters:**

- Chicago Appleseed Fund for Justice
- Chicago Community Bond Fund
- Chicago Council of Lawyers
- Community Renewal Society
- Chicago Urban League
- Illinois Justice Project
- Restore Justice Illinois

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