



## North Carolina Department of Correction

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**TO:** John Poteat  
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**FROM:** Nicole Sullivan  
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**RE:** Legislative Request: Blocking Cell Phone Calls from Prison

Cell phones in prisons are considered one of the most pressing security issues facing prisons across the country. In NC prisons, 635 cell phones were confiscated during the last fiscal year. Cell phones are used to organize gang activity, facilitate escapes, intimidate witnesses, support criminal activities, and maintain communication with friends and family. Correctional agencies are struggling to keep these devices out of prisons, and are now turning to technology as a potential solution.

Currently, the NC Department of Correction uses a number of methods to stop cell phones from entering prisons as well as detecting the contraband once it has been smuggled into prison facilities. Searching visitors and staff as they enter and exit the prison is one of the major security tools used. Additionally, the Department uses hand-held and walk through metal detectors and canine detection (one dog available for 70 prisons). All of these methods can be effective in addressing this problem, but they are not sufficient to eliminate the problem. With cellphones being so small and easy to conceal, and extremely valuable on the prison black market, the only way to eliminate the problem is to render them useless.

Therefore, technology which includes "jamming," "shielding," and "managed access" are being discussed as ways to eliminate cell phones by disrupting calls within the prison setting. "Jamming" is the best solution because it would make a cell phone useless by blocking the signal within range of the device, however this practice is illegal under current FCC guidelines. "Shielding" uses special types of films and fabrics in spaces to block cell phone transmissions. The problem with "jamming" and "shielding" is that both of these options would impact all cell phone calls including legitimate uses. Lastly, "managed access" would prevent unauthorized cell phone calls to be transmitted. All calls and text messages (incoming and outgoing) would be routed to a device that would determine whether the call/text message was authorized based on registration of the cell number. This would allow calls to 911 or other legitimate uses from authorized cells to be transmitted while the calls from unregistered cell numbers would not be transmitted.