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**U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement**

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AUGUST 6, 2024 • WASHINGTON, DC • STATEMENT, COVID-19

## Statement on free cell phone minutes provided during the COVID-19 public health emergency

“During the COVID-19 public health emergency, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement followed CDC guidelines to protect those in our custody including by pausing in-person visitation. To ensure noncitizens could still visit with their families, loved ones, and attorneys, the agency paid for 520 phone minutes per month for each person — at no cost to those in custody. It was the right thing to do at the time.

Since the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency, the agency has reinstated in-person visitations, expanded its Virtual Attorney Visitation system, and continued to provide free access to pro bono legal services through tablets, as appropriated by the Congress. At the same time, the agency responded to significant fiscal challenges by reducing or avoiding custody costs, including by saving \$10.2 million by ending the 520 free phone minutes. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement would gladly reinstate the 520 minutes calling program with adequate appropriated funds — but unfortunately, funding is a continued struggle, and the limited funds available are needed to carry out our congressionally mandated mission.”

Updated: 08/06/2024

## MEDIA INQUIRIES

For media inquiries about ICE activities, operations, or policies, contact the ICE Office of Public Affairs at (202) 732-4646.

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