



April 6, 2020

American Securities  
299 Park Avenue  
New York, NY 10171  
(212) 476-8000

Dear Michael Fisch,

The COVID-19 pandemic has overwhelmed many public systems, and the correctional system is no different. Prisons and jails are breeding grounds for infection as people are crowded into tight quarters and forced to share cells and showers, making social distancing impossible and allowing the disease to spread rapidly.

We are writing to demand that you take action to address the predatory behavior of your portfolio company: GTL (formerly Global Tel Link). GTL and its underlying subsidiaries are using the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to further exploit incarcerated people and their families, which will cost people their health and wellbeing, and even their lives.

For years, GTL has preyed upon the human need for connection in charging families as much as \$16.50 for a simple 15-minute call.<sup>1</sup> Due to GTL's high rates, families are routinely forced to choose whether they can afford to pay rent or pay for their child to hear the voice of an incarcerated parent. In fact, one-third of families with incarcerated loved ones goes into debt trying to stay connected, and 87% percent of those paying these costs are women—largely women of color.<sup>2</sup>

As COVID-19 rages and prisons and jails suspend visits to curb the spread of infection, human connection has become even more important. Yet, aside from offering families an insulting one or two free phone calls each week, GTL has done little to help families connect at this important time. Instead, it has continued charging exorbitant rates, further separating families. The resulting isolation carries significant health public consequences, leading to feelings of stress and anxiety that has been shown to weaken immune systems and increase susceptibility to infection.

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<sup>1</sup> Wagner, Peter & Alexi Jones. "State of Phone Justice." *Prison Policy Initiative*, 11 Feb. 2019, [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/phones/appendix\\_table\\_7.html](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/phones/appendix_table_7.html). (Barrien County, Michigan).

<sup>2</sup> Saneta de Vuono-Powell et al., *Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families*, Sept. 2015, <http://ellabakercenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/who-pays.pdf>.

Even under normal circumstances, families struggle to connect their incarcerated loved ones. But, during this pandemic, these costs are particularly hard to bear as people contend with reduced pay, job loss, or unplanned eldercare and childcare. GTL's predatory pricing practices force families to decide whether to pay their gas bill so they can stay warm or pay for a call with their loved one. These are impossible decisions that you can solve.

To protect the lives of the hundreds of thousands of people who depend on these services, you must immediately direct executive management at GTL and its subsidiaries to:

- Provide unlimited free phone calls, video calls, and emails to all people in contracted facilities,
- Work with correctional agencies to expand infrastructure and calling hours,
- Waive all related fees, including account deposit fees, and
- Eliminate deposit limits,
- Expedite money order deposits, and
- Increase the collection of free books, movies, and games available on tablets.

Through GTL and its subsidiaries, American Securities generates revenue and builds wealth off people in the criminal legal system, disproportionately people of color and in poverty. You now have a responsibility to protect the population you have been profiting off of. You must take immediate steps to prevent and address their exploitation during COVID-19.

We are open to dialogue on the above matters, and in the meantime, we will be sharing this letter with American Securities' investors and other private equity firms that own prison service corporations. We are also contacting the following bodies with similar demands: Federal Communications Commission, Federal Bureau of Prisons, National Governors' Association, United States Conference of Mayors, and National Sheriffs' Association. In addition, we have submitted an emergency request to the Federal Communications Commission asking it to encourage telecom corporations like GTL to provide free calls during the pandemic, or for the Commission to exercise its authority to make calls free if corporations will not do so voluntarily.

In closing, we urge you to use this moment to reevaluate your investment portfolio and the role American Securities plays in upholding the nation's long-lasting carceral crisis that has decimated communities of color and poverty. Until you exit this industry entirely, you will have a hand in exploiting vulnerable people, exacerbating racial disparities, separating loved ones, and driving families into poverty. You have a choice. This will be your legacy.

Sincerely,

Bianca Tylek  
Executive Director  
Worth Rises

Jim Baker  
Executive Director  
Private Equity Stakeholder Project

Scott Roberts  
Senior Director of Criminal Justice Campaigns  
Color of Change

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CC:

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