

2026 RES-038

URGING THE DANE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE TO INITIATE A REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP) FOR DANE COUNTY JAIL RESIDENT COMMUNICATION SERVICES WITH ENHANCED PRIVACY, AFFORDABILITY, AND TRANSPARENCY STANDARDS

The current use of jail communication technology, including telephone and video visitation services, raises significant concerns regarding financial impacts on individuals and their families, and the fundamental right to maintain connections with loved ones while incarcerated.

Research consistently demonstrates that incarcerated individuals who maintain strong contact with family and loved ones have better outcomes, including lower rates of reincarceration, improved mental health, and smoother reintegration into the community.

The Dane County Board recognizes that a phone call home is a critically important tool for keeping families intact and reducing recidivism, rather than a mere privilege.

The majority of people held in the Dane County Jail have not been convicted of a crime and are awaiting trial. Charging these individuals and their families to maintain basic human connection compounds financial hardships.

The Dane County Board rejected a previous contract with Smart Communications in September 2025 due to concerns regarding mail scanning, data privacy, and the absence of free communication options.

On May 14, 2026, the Dane County Board rejected the contract with ViaPath, the runner-up from the January 2025 RFP, which was a step backward in key financial respects, including a \$0.06/minute tablet usage fee that would disproportionately impact residents with disabilities.

The results of the January 2025 RFP are now over a year old, and the original process did not adequately specify the Dane County Board's values regarding subsidized communication and updated data privacy ordinances.

A focused, well-run RFP process can be completed before the current service needs change in November, ensuring the county secures a contract that reflects its community values and meets safety needs.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Dane County Board of Supervisors urges the Dane County Sheriff's Office to initiate a new competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process for jail resident telephone and video visitation services.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the County Board supports efforts by the Sheriff's Office to encourage applications from all qualified companies, including both for-profit and non-profit entities.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that prior to issuance of the RFP, the Dane County Sheriff's Office is requested to present a draft of the RFP to the Public Protection & Judiciary Committee for public notice and input to ensure it aligns with the board's values on communication accessibility.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that it is the intent of the Dane County Board that any resulting contract for jail resident communication services include the following standards and requirements:

- Technical Standards: The contract shall include all technical requirements for audio, video, and text communication from the original January 2025 RFP, but shall explicitly exclude any requirements for mail scanning;
- One of the following subsidized Communication options:
 1. Partially Subsidized Tier: A partially subsidized option for communications (including voice, text, and video) utilizing bulk rates paid for by Dane County. As part of this tier, the vendor is welcome to provide a limited set of free communications (including voice, text, and video) at no cost to the county or the residents.
 2. Fully Subsidized Tier: A fully subsidized communication model (including voice, text, and video) where all costs are paid for by Dane County to ensure free access for residents.
- Prohibition on Tablet Usage Fees: Elimination of per-minute fees for basic tablet functions, particularly for text-based communication used by residents;
- Enhanced Data Privacy: Strict prohibitions on the sale of data to advertisers and unauthorized third-party access;
- Ownership and Control: Full ownership, control, and management of all collected data by the Dane County Sheriff's Office.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Dane County Board of Supervisors supports collaborative efforts among the Sheriff's Office, the Department of Administration, Dane County leadership, and the community to identify and secure a sustainable funding source for subsidized communication services.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Dane County Sheriff's Office is requested to provide a report to the Public Protection & Judiciary Committee on the outcome of the RFP process and the resulting contract for jail resident communication services.