



April 6, 2020

Platinum Equity  
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Dear Tom Gores,

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: Aventiv Technologies. Aventiv, which is comprised of Securus, JPay, and Satellite Tracking of People (STOP), is 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.

### **Securus**

For years, Securus has charged families as much as \$25 for a 15-minute phone call.<sup>1</sup> Due to Securus' 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, Securus has done little to help families connect at this important time. Instead, it has continued charging exorbitant rates, further separating families.

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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/state\\_of\\_phone\\_justice.html](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/phones/state_of_phone_justice.html).

<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>.

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.

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. Securus' 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 Securus and its subsidiaries to:

- Provide unlimited free phone and video calls 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.

## **JPay**

Long before COVID-19 took over the world, JPay was exploiting the incarcerated population by selling emails—free to the rest of the world—and charging exorbitant rates for payment processing. Now, JPay wants credit for offering incarcerated people and their families a few free email “stamps,” but it gets none. Aside from giving out items that should have always been free, JPay has done nothing for families. Like Securus, JPay has simply used this public health crisis to exploit their vulnerable customers.

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

- Provide unlimited emails to all people in contracted facilities,
- Waive all related fees, including money transfer fees,
- Eliminate deposit limits,
- Expedite money order deposits, and
- Increase the collection of free books, movies, and games available on tablets.

## **Satellite Tracking of People (STOP)**

STOP charges people for their freedom, which is troubling under normal circumstances but can be deadly today. STOP charges people as much as \$16 per day to wear an electronic monitor.<sup>3</sup> As facilities release vulnerable people from incarceration to stop the spread of COVID-19, STOP should not be working against them by encouraging law enforcement to employ electronic monitors on those released, charging insurmountable fees for electronic monitoring, and sending

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<sup>3</sup> Markowitz, Eric. “Electronic Monitoring Has Become the New Debtors Prison.” *Newsweek*, 23 Nov. 2015, <https://www.newsweek.com/2015/12/04/electronic-monitoring-has-become-new-debtors-prison-397225.html>.

people back to prison for the inability to pay—a common practice for STOP and others in the surveillance industry.

To protect the lives of people, you must immediately direct executive management at STOP to:

- Cease all lobbying and refrain from encouraging the use of electronic monitoring in the release of incarcerated people,
- Eliminate all activation and monitoring fees for recently released people, and
- Waive monitoring fees for people currently being surveilled.

Platinum Equity’s portfolio contains several businesses such as Aventiv that exclusively target incarcerated people and their families— disproportionately people of color and in poverty—to generate revenue and build wealth. 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 Platinum Equity’s 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 Securus 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 Platinum Equity 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,

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Executive Director  
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CC:

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