



Federal Prison Officials Resist Rise in Inmate Restitution to Victims

The Federal Bureau of Prisons has pushed back against efforts to make inmates pay much more of their court-ordered restitution to crime victims, in part because the money they would use helps fund salary and benefits for hundreds of staff positions, [reports the Washington Post](#).

Federal prisoner spending generates more than \$80 million a year for the agency — mostly from profits on items like commissary purchases and phone calls. The agency earns interest from some accounts. In Justice Department discussions, senior prison officials argued that the agency should not dramatically increase the amount of prisoner money turned over to victims. Any sharp uptick, the people described officials saying, would cut into a vital income stream at a time when the agency is understaffed.

Jack Donson, a retired Bureau of Prisons case manager coordinator who now consults on the federal prison system, said the issue highlights a “dysfunctional” culture at the prison bureau, with officials focused on preserving the flow of money through commissary accounts — known within the agency as the “Trust Fund.”

“At meetings, staffers often referred to the Trust Fund as a ‘slush fund,’ so I have always been suspicious of it,” Donson said.

Some high-profile inmates, including Boston marathon bomber [Dzhokhar Tsarnaev](#) and former [USA Gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar](#), had sizable prison account balances yet paid very little of what they owed to their victims.

How, or if, the Justice Department decides to set new rules could affect another high-profile inmate: R&B singer R. Kelly, who has been [sentenced to 30 years in prison](#) for sex trafficking.

Kelly has about \$28,000 in his prison account and owes \$140,000 in court-ordered fines, including a \$40,000 penalty for a fund for human trafficking victims.

For years, the Bureau of Prisons has argued that whatever balance inmates may have in their accounts, they should only be required to pay \$25 every three months — just over \$8 a month — to any court-ordered victim restitution.