



Legislative Testimony

Oregon Criminal Defense Lawyers Association

May 8, 2019

The Honorable Chair Williamson, Chair
House Judiciary Committee, Members

Re: Testimony in support of SB 498

Dear Chair Williamson and Members of the Committee:

About OCDLA:

The Oregon Criminal Defense Lawyers Association (OCDLA) is a private, non-partisan, non-profit bar association of attorneys who represent juveniles and adults in delinquency, dependency, criminal prosecutions, appeals, civil commitment, and post-conviction relief proceedings throughout the state of Oregon. The Oregon Criminal Defense Lawyers Association serves the defense and juvenile law communities through continuing legal education, public education, networking, and legislative action.

OCDLA promotes legislation beneficial to the criminal and juvenile justice systems that protects the constitutional and statutory rights of those accused of crime or otherwise involved in delinquency and dependency systems as well as to the lawyers and service providers who do this difficult work. We also advocate against issues that would harm our goals of reform within the criminal and juvenile justice systems.

SB 498 Protects Oregon Families and Reduces Recidivism Rates

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to submit comments on SB 498. SB 498 prohibits correctional facilities from contracting with telephone services under which the department, city, county, or facility receives payment for said services which are provided to inmates. This prohibition works to ensure that there is no economic incentive to charge exploitative rates for prison phone calls. Across the country, exploitative prison phone practices have forced poor and vulnerable families to pay as much as \$25 for a 15-minute phone call.¹

According to a 2015 study, one in three families go into debt due to the exorbitantly high cost of maintaining contact with their incarcerated loved ones.² OCDLA believes that families should not be forced to endure substantial economic burden in order to maintain bare minimum communication with those they love.

¹ *That Prison Telephone Racket? It Could Soon Get Even More Exploitative*, BOSTON GLOBE (Aug. 1, 2018), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/editorials/2018/08/01/that-prison-telephone-racket-could-soon-get-even-more-exploitative/Ltxjqa8cRWHHPYzaKMwM4H/story.html>.

² SANETA DE VUONO-POWELL ET AL., WHO PAYS? THE TRUE COST OF INCARCERATION ON FAMILIES 9 (2015).

Additionally, exploitative prison phone call rates actively frustrate support systems that are known to keep folks out of the prison system. Over several decades, numerous studies have shown that family contact and communication reduce recidivism.³

For the reasons outlined above, OCDLA supports SB 498 and urges Chair Prozanski and Members of the Committee to do the same so we can better support and protect Oregon families and reduce recidivism rates in the Oregon prison system.

Thank you for your consideration.

/s/Mary Sofia

For questions or comments contact Mary A. Sofia, OSB # 111401
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³ Alex Friedmann, *Lowering Recidivism Through Family Communication*, PRISON LEGAL NEWS, April 2015, at 24, 24.