

February 8, 2021

The Honorable Janelle Bynum, Chair
The Honorable Ron Noble, Vice-Chair
The Honorable Karin Power, Vice-Chair
House Committee on Judiciary

Re: **Support for HB 2912**

Dear Chair Bynum and Members of the Committee,

I support HB 2912.

When I went to prison, I was denied contact with my children by their father. He refused all calls, letters, changed his phone number, and blocked my family from social media so they couldn't contact them on my behalf. He really did everything to block my ability to communicate with my kids. Not having that contact was emotionally traumatizing. My mental health was in the worse shape that it had ever been. Depression, anxiety, guilt of being in prison, shame, and anger had taken over my life. I would talk to other adults in custody (AICs) and they would tell me to contact the family advocate or other programs that could possibly help me get contact with my kids again. So I did. I contacted every person possible within the prison system to seek out help and every time I was told there was nothing that could be done to help me.

It felt like I kept hitting a dead end. Being told that there was no help for my situation, time and time again, was detrimental to my mindset. I started feeling like I was never going to get the help I was desperately seeking. I began getting in trouble because of my negative attitude and bad outlook on life. That's when the Re*Membering Legal Services Program came in. I requested legal help thinking it was just going to be another dead end, but I had to try and exhaust all avenues because my kids are worth it. I was put on the call out for a meeting with the attorneys and after a few talks they said they were going to help me. That is when everything started turning around for me. My attitude changed, my outlook on life improved—I actually had hope for the future.

Before getting legal assistance from the Re*Membering, I was worried about getting released and being able to stay sober. I wasn't sure I could deal with the emotions I had been feeling regarding my children and the situation with their father. Being in this program and getting the help I did from them gave me piece of mind knowing I literally tried everything in my power to get in contact with my kids. The Re*Membering Program helped me take my ex-husband to Court in Oklahoma to try to enforce the visitation schedule set up in a previous court hearing. They wrote legal briefs on my behalf, arranged to have me appear in court by phone, and helped me prepare for the hearing. Although the Judge still denied my request to have contact with my children while I was in prison, I knew that I did absolutely everything in my power to fight for my kids. Later on in life, when my kids are old enough to fully understand the situation,

they will see that I did not just forget about them, I fought and tried everything I could to talk to them. I want them to know that their Mom didn't just sit back and do nothing, she fought as hard as she could for them. I hope that will ease some of the hurt I caused them by committing a crime and being sentenced to prison. Without the Re*Membering Program I wouldn't have been able to show my kids just how hard I was fighting for them.

Being in this program gave me hope and a new life to look forward to upon release. The emotions of guilt, anger and shame had subsided. The Judge stated during the hearing that I could resume contact with my children after release, which gave me something to look forward to. I had been trying for 14 months to get contact with my kids and this program renewed the fight in me for when I got out.

When released I got a full-time job right away and I've been living at a transitional house (Sponsors) for the last three months. I am about to graduate from their Emergence Program. My attorney helped me to contact my ex-husband after my release and we were able to work out a schedule where I now have regular phone and video contact with my kids. We video visit just about every day on Messenger and I'm loving my life. I don't think I would be able to say that if it wasn't for this program! It really saved me from myself.

I can't thank my attorney Alex and the rest of the Re*Membering attorneys enough for everything they did for me. Alex is an amazing person, this program is truly a blessing for people that need legal advice and representation within the prison system. There needs to be more programs like this for incarcerated people. This program was the key to my success upon release and for my mental health and forgiving myself of the guilt and shame I once felt. Forgiveness is key to a successful life. If you can't forgive yourself and move forward you will slip back into the depression and mental illness and old ways to escape the emotional issues. So I want to thank this program one more time for all the help they gave me. I don't think they will ever understand just how much they helped me.

I strongly urge you to support HB 2912.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Pierce