

Dear Oregon legislators,

My name is Wendy Sue Phillips and I am writing in support of HB 3118. I live in Chewelah, Washington. My son is currently incarcerated over 400 miles away at Oregon State Penitentiary. Unfortunately, due to my health — I had an amputation on my left leg and am on hemodialysis — I am unable to visit him in person. My son has been in prison since 2020, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, I was able to speak with him frequently because the system was different and phone calls were free. Phone conversations allowed for much more constructive conversation than letters. Since then, however, I've been having issues with registration and haven't been able to talk to him. I have thirteen children, nine of whom are adopted, and I am on disability, so even if I got past the registration issues, money would be tight.

Being able to talk to my son during the COVID-19 pandemic gave him hope for the future. Our conversations allowed us to address his situation in a meaningful way. I encouraged him to acknowledge the part he played in his circumstances and recognize that his memories of the past weren't always accurate. When I adopted him at age 6, he had already lived in 22 foster homes, and had a lot of struggles. He is a really sweet person, but there are still issues he struggles with. I strived to show him love and support, while also helping him recognize his own responsibility for things. Everyone has a past, and that past affects how they view their current reality. Our conversations helped him stop seeing himself primarily as a victim and acknowledge the many positive things in his life. Despite the ways I challenged him, he was always happy to talk with me, and he called me often.

It has been hard to go without phone calls. I've had seven heart attacks, and while I was able to talk with him about the first few, I haven't been able to do the same for the last couple. He also doesn't know that I'm on hemodialysis or that I had an amputation. When we talked during COVID-19, he expressed fears that I might die and that he wouldn't know.

The main obstacle that has prevented me from speaking with him over the last couple years is this extremely problematic registration system. But in the event that I am able to solve those issues, free phone calls would make a difference by allowing me to be in touch with my son more often than I would otherwise be able to. I believe it's a reasonable request for phone calls to be free, or at least for there to be a certain amount available each month. In the long term, it could also reduce behavioral issues among inmates.

Sincerely,

Wendy Sue Phillips  
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