

Dear Oregon legislators,

My name is Tasha Terry, and I live in Bound Brook, New Jersey. My spouse is incarcerated in Oregon. We met while he was in the prison system in Albuquerque through his cellmate, who is engaged to my little sister. We just passed one year together, and so far, our entire relationship has unfolded while he's been incarcerated. In addition to texting, we call around ten to twelve times per week.

Since I'm across the country from him, I'm not able to visit, so being able to hear his voice keeps him close to me. He doesn't get to talk to his family as much as he'd like, so it's important for me to help keep his spirits up and encourage him to stay focused on the positive things he's doing to better himself. We talk about our kids. We encourage each other and laugh together. We share the little details of our days, such as what I made for dinner, or what he is studying in class. Although these things may sound trivial, sharing them goes a long way towards building a relationship that feels as close as possible to what it would be if he were home with me. I never make an important decision without him, and when I am dealing with something hard, he is the first person I want to talk to.

This year has been full of "firsts" for us, including holidays. Even though we can't be physically together, being able to call our loved one to wish a Happy Valentine's Day or a Merry Christmas has been really meaningful for both of us. Having someone we know is always happy to answer the phone is vital for both of us mentally. It's about knowing you have support and that you are never alone. As a human, it's vital to know that there are people who love and care about you, even if it's just one person. We both rely on that reassurance and support.

Sometimes I spend up to \$150 per month just to stay in touch. These days, two incomes are essential to sustain a family, while I am responsible for running a household on a single income. On top of household responsibilities and paying for my kids' school and college tuition, communication costs can make everything feel tighter and more strained. But that is a sacrifice I am willing to make to stay in touch with my spouse.

If we didn't have to worry about the cost of phone calls, we'd have the freedom to call each other as often as we'd like without the financial stress. That money could go towards other responsibilities or be saved for the future. The ability to save that money and not constantly worry about phone bills would be a blessing in our lives.

Sincerely,

Tasha Terry
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