

Dear Oregon legislators,

My name is Nisq'Atawi Shuey and I live in Klamath Falls. My son has been incarcerated at OSP for the past five years. Between the four-hour drive and my work schedule, I have not been able to visit him in person. Phone calls have therefore been the only communication I get with him. We talk every couple weeks.

My son struggles with mental health issues, so being able to talk with him regularly is vital for his well being. Especially when he is in a rough patch, he tells me it feels really good to hear my voice. Telling me about what is going on in his life and hearing about how his family members are doing helps him reach a more stable place. Last night, I put him on speakerphone with his six-year old sister, who told him about making a basket at her basketball game. He was so proud. When he first went to prison, I was in active addiction, but I now have five years of recovery, and hearing about that journey gives him hope.

Unfortunately, the cost of phone calls have been a huge obstacle. With my son's limited income in prison, he has to make difficult decisions between putting the little money he has towards phone calls or buying food, hygiene products, and envelopes from the commissary. His inability to afford phone calls means it usually falls on his family members outside of prison to pay for them. Early in his incarceration, I was living on state assistance, with only \$432 per month to support myself and my children. I could sometimes only put \$5 or \$10 on the phone. I already had to make impossible decisions between paying the power bill, putting gas in my car, or buying diapers for my youngest child. Paying for phone calls added just one more thing to balance. Our inability to afford phone calls during that time significantly limited how much we were able to be in touch. There were often instances where he would call me but I could not afford to answer. He would get discouraged, thinking I didn't want to talk to him, which would make him retreat into himself and wait another two weeks before calling again. Of course I wanted to talk to him; I just didn't have the funds to do so.

Now, I thankfully have a good job and affording phone calls is not the struggle it was before, but it is still not easy. I try to put at least \$20 on my phone account each month. When I'm able, I also try to put money on his account so he can call other family members including his brother, who is his best friend, his father, and his grandparents. He especially values the time he has with his grandparents, as they are facing health issues and it is not certain they will be around when he gets out. If phone calls were free, my son would be able to call all of us more often. He could do so without having to make the difficult choices he currently must about whether he can put money towards phone calls, and if so, which family members to prioritize.

Sincerely,

Nisq'Atawi Shuey
Klamath Falls, OR