

Dear Oregon legislators,

My name is Lindsey Caudle Herrera and my husband is incarcerated at OSP. My husband and I have been legally married for nineteen years, though that has included long periods during which we have not been in touch. We share two kids, a nineteen year old son who just started college and a six year old daughter. My husband has spent the majority of the last nineteen years in and out of prison, so a large proportion of our relationship has occurred over the phone. I live in Salem, but visiting the prison brings up complicated emotions for me, so my husband and I find it easier to stay in touch by phone. Depending on his funds, my husband tries to call me and our daughter twice per week.

After a long time apart, my husband and I reconnected two years ago at the funeral of his younger brother. I was there in person, while he was there via video visit. Our conversation instantly felt comfortable and natural, as if no time had passed. Despite the many complicated aspects of our relationship, the years we have spent linked to each other have created a deep and unconventional bond. Strengthening that relationship over the last two years has been deeply meaningful for both of us. My husband has life without parole and we both know he is never coming home. His life choices weigh heavily on him. He has a lot of regrets. In some ways, phone calls with loved ones are one of the only things he has left. Our phone calls help him maintain his optimism and positivity. Our phone calls are also a big deal for me. There was a two or three month period where my phone company updated its spam blocker and I wasn't able to receive calls from the prison. Until I resolved that issue, I felt like something was missing. It was depressing. Being deprived of communication with him reminded me how much of a difference it makes in my life.

Even after rebuilding my own relationship with my husband, I was apprehensive about introducing him into the life of our daughter. At five years old, she had started to ask questions about where her father was after noticing that most of her classmates had two parents. My husband was eager to be involved in her life, but I knew it was no small matter to link my daughter to this person whom she would never be able to have a conventional relationship with. I will never forget my daughter's reaction when I finally decided to introduce the two over the phone. Her face filled with awe and joy. Today, her relationship with her father means everything to her. Every time she hears the special ringtone I set up for her father's calls, her face lights up and she immediately comes running from the other room to speak with him. Her reactions confirm for me that I made the right decision. My daughter's relationship with her father has only been possible thanks to the phone. At this point, his voice is the only way she knows him.

Unfortunately, it falls on my husband to pay for all of our calls, as I currently have no income. My husband puts almost all of the roughly fifty dollars he makes per month straight onto his phone account. In addition to calling myself and our daughter, he also calls other family

members. Usually, there is enough money for us to speak once or twice per week for the full thirty minutes allowed. When he is running low, he calls only to quickly say that he cannot afford to talk for long, but that he just wants to speak with our daughter really fast as well as let me know he is thinking of me. If phone calls were free, we would be able to speak much more regularly. We wouldn't have those awkward moments of trying to pick up conversations from a week before. I wouldn't feel pressure to distill everything going on in my life and our daughter's life into bullet points. It wouldn't feel like he was missing so much.

If someone is in prison, they're already paying a debt to society for whatever crime they have been convicted of. The least we can do is allow them to stay connected to what is good and wholesome. Communication with loved ones gives them something to look forward to, keeps them connected to humanity, and prevents them from getting stuck in their own heads. And it matters just as much to people on the outside that we are able to speak with our loved ones in prison. I need my husband in my life and our daughter needs her father in her life. Making prison phone calls free has the potential to change lives.

Sincerely,

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