

Dear Oregon legislators,

My name is Jim Jones and I am writing in support of HB 3118. My perspective spans both sides of this issue, as I recently left prison after serving thirty years and am now a point of outside connection for my close friends who are still in prison. Since my release four months ago, I have lived in McMinnville, doing maintenance and janitorial work, repairing my late mother's house, and, most importantly, working to reintegrate myself back into society. Most recently, I have spent the past week supporting my friend's transition after his recent release from prison, sharing with him all of the resources that benefitted me over the past four months.

Phone calls with family were among the most meaningful experiences during my thirty years in prison. It was over the phone that I re-established relationships with my mother and brother after spending more than fifteen years completely estranged from the family. It was incredibly nerve-wracking to make that first call, but I knew I needed to swallow my pride and do it. Over the course of weekly Sunday phone calls, my mother and I were able to work through issues from the past and slowly build a close and fulfilling relationship. We talked weekly for ten or eleven years. That period was the best our relationship had ever been. She was in her 90's and we both knew she wasn't going to make it until my release. Fortunately, she was able to visit me in person one time before she passed away. It is impossible to describe how much I cherish those moments with her, which were a direct result of re-establishing our relationship over the phone. I am fortunate to have had a high paying job in Prison Industries that allowed me to afford those calls.

When you are in prison, the phone is a very valuable resource and lifeline. Having a connection to the outside changes your psyche. It makes you feel connected to the world rather than isolated from the public. The knowledge that you have someone in your corner out in the community gives you the incentive to be more of a model prisoner because you don't want to let them down or put them in a position where they would be concerned. I watched access to the phone, or lack thereof, dramatically impact people's moods. When guys ran out of money and couldn't make calls, you could see how much stress it caused. Regaining the ability to call turned their mood 180 degrees as they came back noticeably more happy and easygoing.

Now that I am out of prison, I stay in contact through messaging and phone calls with four friends who are still in prison. One of them cannot afford to pay for calls, so I add between \$15 and \$25 to his account every month. When it comes to that friend, I am also aware that I am his only close connection on the outside. It is interesting to have switched roles to the person on the outside whom the AIC depends on for connection to the outside. I arrange my days around these calls because I know that just as phone calls affected me when I was incarcerated, they are vital for my friends' mental wellbeing and sense of connection to the outside world.

To put it in a nutshell, when people are not able to communicate with their loved ones, it makes them feel removed from society, like a pariah or second-class citizen, and that negativity directly affects the way they act. Free phone calls would remove that stress and improve people's morale, which would not only benefit AICs, but also their families and DOC staff.

Sincerely,

James Jones  
McMinnville, OR  
(971) 261-0776