

Dear Oregon legislators,

My name is Charles Hayes. My brother has been incarcerated for thirteen years, and I find myself in a frustrating position, being unable to talk to him simply because I can't afford it in this economy. I live in Pocatello, Idaho, which is about eleven hours away from OSP, and due to the distance, I haven't been able to visit him even once. In the first few years after he was incarcerated, we used to talk on the phone regularly. But as money has become harder to save, those calls have become less and less frequent. Now we don't talk more than per few times a year. Because I can't afford it, my brother pays for the phone calls. That means when he's calling me, he's taking money away from buying basic necessities.

When we do talk, we catch up on life, how things are going, how his nieces and nephews are doing, and whatever else is on our minds. We had a rocky relationship when we were younger, but talking now has been really beneficial for rebuilding that bond. The problem is, I can't afford to call him when I need to talk, and by the time he can afford to call me, the moment has passed and the things I wanted to discuss are no longer as relevant.

As someone who has been incarcerated myself, I understand the feeling of being cut off from the outside world. Having the ability to talk to family and loved ones is crucial for staying grounded and not getting lost in your own thoughts. Those who are indigent are forced to suffer in their own heads, with no connection to the outside world. Incarceration already takes so much from a person, and losing access to family is an additional, unnecessary punishment.

My brother feels like he's missing out on life. When he doesn't have the money to make calls, he literally sits in his cell, wondering what's happening with his family. Free phone calls wouldn't just improve my relationship with my brother. They would also help him stay connected with our parents and his nieces and nephews. They would help him feel connected and allow him to be a regular part of our lives. HB 3118 has my full support.

Sincerely,

Charles Hays  
Pocatello, Idaho