

Dear Oregon legislators,

My name is Lauren Holtz and my cousin is incarcerated at Oregon State Penitentiary. I live about an hour away and am able to visit him once every few months. Over the last five months, phone calls have been the primary way we have stayed in touch. We talk every week or two.

Our phone calls have been invaluable for our relationship. We talk about how my cousin is doing day to day, his medical issues, his goals, and what he's working on to prepare for life after prison. I fill him in on how myself and our family members are doing. It has been good to keep him updated about what is going on out here, since his perception of things is very different from inside. If he were to leave prison without this context, it would make it harder for him to navigate systems and social situations after release. My cousin told me last time we talked that our conversations have completely changed his outlook on life. He has discovered newfound motivation to build a positive life for himself, and encouragement from family members such as myself have gone a long way towards fostering that.

Unfortunately, our phone calls have been limited by cost. I can only afford to spend \$25 per month, so we consciously try to keep our conversations brief to save money. If phone calls were free, I would be able to call him more often. Even still, my cousin is more fortunate than many AICs who do not receive any support. If we want AICs to reintegrate into society successfully after release, we must eliminate financial barriers hindering their communication with their supporters throughout their incarceration. Whether all phone calls are made free or just a certain allotment per week, everyone should have access to communicate with someone. It is a matter of equity. Poverty should not stop anyone from connecting with family members and feeling that they are cared about. It is about allowing people to feel hope, love, and care. These are the things that make us human, and they are a necessity for every person.

Sincerely,

Lauren Holtz