



Criminal Justice Reform Clinic
Lewis & Clark Law School
February 18, 2025

The Criminal Justice Reform Clinic at Lewis & Clark Law School, is a member of the Keep Families Connected coalition and provides legal assistance and education to Adults in Custody (AICs) throughout Oregon. The Clinic communicates with AICs, their friends, and their families on a daily basis and has seen how expensive communication costs inflict harm on Oregonians.

Currently, Oregon families collectively spend approximately \$9 million a year to communicate with their incarcerated loved ones. As we know, many individuals are incarcerated in facilities far from their families and loved ones, making regular in-person visits logistically and financially challenging or often impossible. For many of these families, phone and video calls are the only way to stay in touch.

The financial cost of this can be devastating. The Clinic has a client who spends over \$200 a month to talk to his daughters regularly. We know AICs who have lost contact with their families and friends because they cannot afford the costs of phone calls to them. It also is more than just the ability to catch up over the phone every once in a while, the high costs of communication prevent family members like parents and children from talking regularly and building or maintaining crucial relationships.

The cost of communication isn't just a family issue, it is also a public safety and rehabilitation issue. Over 90% of Oregon's prison population will eventually return to the community. Studies from other states that have already implemented free phone and video legislation have shown that increased access to communication decreases violence in prisons, contributes to rehabilitation, and decreases recidivism rates, in turn making our communities safer.

Additionally, with the newly passed Oregon Department of Corrections' (ODOC) guidelines that further restrict mail access within prisons, AICs are even more cut off from loved ones.

Free communication legislation has already been passed in various states across the country to alleviate the burdens of exploitative communication costs for families with incarcerated loved ones. Connecticut, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Colorado, and California have all passed legislation that protects families' abilities to communicate to their incarcerated loved ones without being burdened or prevented from doing so by exorbitant costs. Oregon has the opportunity to follow their lead.

With the new Federal Communications Commission rules mandating a 33% decrease in Oregon's prison phone call rates, the ODOC will have to renegotiate its communication contract over the coming months. This is a perfect opportunity to make communication free.

The Keep Families Connected coalition urges you to support HB 3118 to make phone calls free for all incarcerated Oregonians and their loved ones. This legislation will ensure that no family in Oregon has to choose between paying their bills and talking to their family.

Thank you for considering this important issue.