

Chair Kropf, Vice-Chairs Chotzen and Wallan, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Agustina Hunziker and I am a student attending Willamette University. I am respectfully submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 3118, which proposes that the Department of Corrections enter into a contract with a third party to provide communications services at no cost to persons confined at a Department of Corrections institution.

As an undergraduate student, I have had the privilege to take a class at the Oregon State Penitentiary and speak with people confined about their experience in the prison. Inside these walls is a group of men in the Lifer's Unlimited Club to which each member is called a lifer. This group is predominantly composed of individuals serving life sentences. My bi-monthly conversations in group discussions with the lifers have shaped my perception of the carceral system and opened my eyes to the flaws of the system. Despite how these men are treated, they are able to find community and a path forward amongst each other. Aside from the community they have built on the inside of the prison walls, communication with loved ones on the outside is essential to their well-being. The lifers shared personal experiences navigating communication with loved ones, and the mental toll it has on them to stay connected. Studies show that inmate phone calls are a way to maintain connection and serve several benefits such as reduced recidivism, emotional support, and preparation for reintegration. By removing the financial burden on inmates and their families to pay for communication, we can take a step in the right direction toward a more just system.

By supporting HB 3118 you will enable Oregon to join Massachusetts, Connecticut, California, Minnesota, and Colorado in removing the cost to stay connected. Please help ensure that persons confined at a Department of Corrections institution can connect with loved ones without financial strain.

Sincerely,
Agustina Hunziker