

Dear Oregon legislators,

My name is Charleen Justice and I am writing to express my support for HB 3118. I was raised in a family with a history of incarceration. Currently, my brother is incarcerated at Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP), but before him, my grandfather, father, stepfather, other brother, and many of my friends were incarcerated as well. I was five years old the first time I used the prison phone system, and 35 years later, I am still relying on it to stay connected. Beyond my personal experience, I have engaged with the incarcerated community through the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program at the University of Oregon, the Enneagram Prison Project, and my volunteer work with Red Lodge, a Native American-led nonprofit providing cultural programming in Oregon prisons. Through countless conversations with adults in custody across various institutions, I have witnessed firsthand how vital phone calls are for maintaining bonds and supporting rehabilitation.

Since I'm not often able to visit, my family, friends, and I have relied on phone calls to stay connected. When my formerly incarcerated brother was frequently attacked by other AICs, the silence between calls left me fearing for his life. The same is true for my currently incarcerated brother, who suffers from seizures, and has also faced physical violence. When we don't hear from him, the uncertainty weighs heavily on me and our family. For him, our phone calls are a tether to the outside world, offering comfort, support, advice, and important updates. It was over the phone that I had to deliver the heartbreaking news of two recent deaths in our family. These phone calls aren't just important, they're vital for his sense of connection and stability.

Over the past month, my brother developed serious breathing issues, began coughing up blood, and was transferred between prisons and medical facilities as doctors searched for answers. During this time, he learned they suspect he has cancer, but for security reasons he wasn't able to contact anyone until he got back to OSP. When he was finally able to call, he sobbed as he explained the isolation and pain of being alone during such a scary experience. To make matters worse, he was recently informed that his initial biopsy was too small to test. Now, he must undergo surgery for another sample. Understandably, he is in a constant state of fear, worried for his life. Without phone access, my family would have no way of knowing what he's going through, and he would be forced to face this ongoing ordeal with little to no emotional support. Having the ability to call us is not just a convenience. It is a crucial link that allows him to maintain connection, seek reassurance, and be reminded that he is not completely alone as he navigates some of the most terrifying times of his life.

Since his return to OSP, we've been able to speak frequently. I do everything I can to support him emotionally and keep him grounded, but he is often frantic and anxious awaiting the next surgery. If we had to go through this without him having access to a phone, it would be even

more traumatic. Beyond emotional support, I am scrambling to manage the logistical aspects of his care. While the Department of Corrections is handling his medical needs for now, his release is less than a month away, and a smooth transition is critical. His new medical team will need his records, and he will need help navigating appointments, surgery, and potentially ongoing treatment. Without regular phone communication, coordinating his care and attempting to keep him calm would be nearly impossible.

Having an incarcerated loved one carries not only an emotional toll but also a financial one. Prison phone calls are expensive, with fees that quickly add up. When I was struggling financially, these costs were a heavy burden. While I'm in a better position now, job security is never guaranteed, and many families simply can't afford it. In Oregon, a large portion of incarcerated individuals come from families living below the poverty line. For them, the high cost of prison calls only deepens existing financial struggles, making regular communication an ongoing challenge. This forced disconnection can be devastating, especially when outside support is essential for rehabilitation and reentry. Free phone calls would remove this barrier, allowing families to stay connected without having to choose between speaking with their loved ones and meeting basic needs.

Beyond eliminating costs, prison phone systems need upgrades to ensure reliable access for all. Limited availability and outdated infrastructure already make communication difficult, further isolating incarcerated individuals from their support networks. Making prison calls free and improving access would help strengthen these connections, giving incarcerated individuals a better chance at successful reentry and allowing them to positively contribute to their families and communities.

I appreciate the efforts of those working to make prison phone calls free in Oregon and believe in the potential benefit of this bill.

Supportively,

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