

Dear Oregon legislators,

My name is Melinda Marinko and I live in Salem, Oregon. My son is currently incarcerated at Oregon State Penitentiary, so I'm able to visit him around two times per month. Over the last decade, however, he has served sentences at various prisons where it was not possible for me to visit. We try to talk on the phone up to four times a week when I can afford to put money on the account. On average, I spend between \$25 and \$50 per month on phone calls to him, but there have been times when money was tight and we were forced to cut back or even go a month at a time without speaking.

When we talk, he tells me about the programs he's involved in and the goals he has for his life. I share with him how much I love him, what's going on with our family, and together we make plans for what steps we both need to take to set him up for success when he's released. During times we don't have money to put on the account, I suppose we just try to send telepathic messages to each other, but suffice it to say that is not a reliable medium for communicating.

Phone calls are extremely important for my son, not only for our relationship but also for his relationship with his father. They didn't always have the best relationship and it has been important for them to reconnect. Thankfully his father can afford it, but if he couldn't, it would be a tragedy. His father went to prison when my son was just two years old. It took him a while to get back on his feet, but he eventually did. I worry about my son, though, because he hasn't had the same resources or support. There have been times when he's been homeless.

My son also has a daughter in California, but he hasn't been able to talk to her at least partially because her mother can't afford to pay for phone calls. I know it would mean the world to both of them to speak with each other. Free phone calls would make it easier for them to reconnect.

I recently saw a poster in prison about a set of items to get together for an individual being released. It included clothing such as underwear, socks, shirts, pants, shoes, and a business casual outfit for a job interview. My first thought was, "I hope my son's dad can pay for this." Because I certainly cannot. I am struggling financially and can barely afford the cost of living. If calls were free, the money we spend on calls could be put towards things like that bundle of clothing to help our son get back on his feet when he is released.

Given how many families already face financial hardship, and how hard it is for people to generate money while incarcerated, making phone calls free would make it much easier for people to stay connected to their loved ones. This is very important for a person's reformation. Connection with people on the outside provides stability and a foundation of support which can be especially helpful after release. Financial hardship is already the reason so many people end up in prison; to have it further limit connection to the outside just adds damage. I believe it

would be a very good investment for the prison system to allocate money towards keeping people connected and I strongly support HB 3118.

Sincerely,

Melinda Marinko

Salem, OR

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