

Maine PRISONER ADVOCACY Coalition



March 24, 2025

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee: My name is Jan Collins, I am Assistant Director of Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (MPAC) an organization committed to ethical, positive, and humane changes in Maine's prison system. I am here in support of [LD 647](#) An Act Regarding Telephone and Video Call Access in Detention and Correctional Facilities and Jails.

During the Covid pandemic we learned to appreciate contact with family. The connections we once took for granted became more precious. We learned that contact was essential to our mental health. NAMI Maine estimated anxiety and depression doubled in Maine during the pandemic as a result of the isolation experienced, in particular by children.¹

The median monthly income for men and women prior to their incarceration is less than half of the average income of people who are not incarcerated.² Desperate poverty is not unusual for a young family whose primary bread winner is incarcerated. It is particularly burdensome for those families to shoulder the cost of transportation or phone calls in order to maintain ties with an incarcerated or detained loved one.

The benefits of maintaining ties with family members are immense, but are particularly important for the mental health and well-being of children with parents who are incarcerated. More than 20,000 children have a parent incarcerated in one of Maine's prisons or jails. At 8%, Maine has the highest incarceration rate of parents in the New England states and 14th highest in the nation.³

“Children who have experienced parental incarceration are more at risk for

homelessness, depression and anxiety, economic instability, low educational attainment, and juvenile justice system involvement,” according to the Cutler Institute Justice Policy Program.

For children, benefits of time spent with their parent may include decreased anxiety about abandonment or the parent’s well-being, increased attachment, healing of grief and loss, decreased feelings of isolation, and improved behavior at home and school.⁴

Our communities are safer, and both parents and children have better outcomes, when healthy contact is maintained during incarceration.

I hope you will consider the impact of telephone and video charges on struggling families in Maine and vote unanimously to support this bill.

With appreciation,

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¹Marley, Greg. *The Impact of Covid-19 on Mental Health and Safety in Maine Students*. National Alliance on Mental Illness Maine. 2022. <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/5873>

²Rabuy, Bernadette and Kopf, Daniel. *Prisons of Poverty: Uncovering the pre-incarceration incomes of the imprisoned*. Prison Policy Initiative. 2015. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/income.html>

³Maine Children’s Alliance. *Parental Incarceration in Maine- The Numbers at a Glance*. <https://www.mekids.org/site/assets/files/1227/parentalincarcerationinmaine.pdf>

⁴Cramer, L., Goff, M., Peterson, B., and Sandstrom, H. (2017). Parent-child visiting practices in prisons and jails: A synthesis of research and practice. Urban institute. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/89601/parent-child_visiting_practices_in_prisons_and_jails.pdf