



TESTIMONY OF ALICIA REA, ESQ.  
LD 647 – Ought to Pass

**An Act Regarding Telephone and Video Call Access in Detention  
and Correctional Facilities and Jails**

Joint Standing Committee on  
Criminal Justice and Public Safety

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Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Hasenfus, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, greetings. My name is Alicia Rea, and I am a policy fellow for the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine, a statewide organization committed to advancing and preserving civil liberties guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions. On behalf of our members, I urge you to support LD 647.

LD 647 would allow inmates to connect with their loved ones more easily by establishing a standard of 90 minutes of free video and phone access per week. For people who are incarcerated, maintaining family and community bonds is crucial to mental health, physical health, community health and community safety. Maine should set this 90-minute threshold for all carceral facilities, allowing for those being held—often without being sentenced—to communicate with both their loved ones.

Experts estimate that nationwide, the families of incarcerated people pay nearly \$3 billion every single year on the hidden costs of incarceration.<sup>1</sup> There are commissary costs, costs associated with visitation, legal costs, medical fees, and of course, costs for phone calls and text messages. According to the Prison Policy Institute, incarcerated people in Maine prisons can expect to earn between 50 cents and \$3.50 per hour.<sup>2</sup> At these wages, incarcerated individuals have to work between 3 and 18 hours to afford the 90-minutes of phone and video calls.

Even though families and communities are footing the bill, our entire state reaps the benefits of these social connections. Good communication

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<sup>1</sup> Beatrice Lockwood & Nicole Lewis, *The Hidden Cost of Incarceration* (Dec. 2019), available at <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2019/12/17/the-hidden-cost-of-incarceration>.

<sup>2</sup> Prison Policy Institute, *How much do incarcerated people earn in each state?*, Apr. 10, 2017, available at <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2017/04/10/wages/>.



throughout incarceration makes people less likely to recidivate after reentering their communities.<sup>3</sup> Maine should itself pay the costs of a standard 90-minute phone and video allowance as an investment in the health of its communities.

We urge you to vote ought to pass.

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<sup>3</sup> Leah Wang, *Research roundup: The positive impacts of family contact for incarcerated people and their families* (Dec. 2021), available at [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/12/21/family\\_contact/](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/12/21/family_contact/).