

Jan Collins
East Wilton

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Senator Deschambault, Rep Warren and honorable members of the criminal justice and public safety committees. My names is Jan Collins and I am assistant director for Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition. I am here today to speak in support of LD 1175 An Act To Prohibit Excessive Telephone, Video and Commissary Charges in Maine Jails and Prisons.

MPAC's mission is to support Maine's incarcerated citizens, their families, and friends in their struggle with Maine's criminal justice system. Our purpose is to reduce Maine's use of incarceration by creating a criminal justice system that is ethical, humane, and restorative in nature.

During the pandemic we have learned to appreciate contact with family more than ever. The connections we once took for granted, family reunions, Thanksgiving dinner, Saturday afternoons with our grandkids, all of these have become more precious than gold. For most of us it has taken more effort to maintain those relationships, but when we were able, it was worth it.

When my father was incarcerated, my mother was left with the care of four children under the age of five. We lost our apartment, transportation and his income - our only means of support. We would have been homeless but for my farmer uncle allowing us to live in a plywood trailer he hauled to county fairs. We had no running water and two plywood bunks to share between the five of us. and an outhouse for plumbing. This kind of desperate poverty is not unusual for a young family whose primary bread winner is incarcerated. So, it is particularly burdensome for those families to pay the additional fees charged by jails and prisons in Maine.

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 3,400 children had a parent incarcerated in one of the state's prisons in the last five years. (The number would be much higher if jails and probation were included.)

"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," the Cutler Institute Justice Policy Program report said. "Incarcerating mothers of young children is particularly problematic as it disrupts a key parental bond during critical years of development."

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

Many thanks,
Jan Collins
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