

Good morning Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety. My name is Sadie Donovan and I am a Senior in the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Maine. I am here today to testify in support of LD1175, An Act to Prohibit Excessive Telephone, Video, and Commissary Charges in Maine Jails and Prisons.

I have previously worked in the behavioral health department at the Somerset County Jail. My work there consisted of substance use disorder screening, assessment, and brief treatment, facilitation of appropriate service referrals, facilitation of group programming, and an overall collaboration with jail staff to provide a continuum of care for the incarcerated population.

I have witnessed, first-hand, the grave importance incarcerated individuals place on their ability to afford, and make phone calls and video visits. I can recall several conversations with individuals who reported to me that they were discontinuing their recommended, prescribed medication in order to save that extra money for longer time on the phone. No individual, whether incarcerated or living in the community, should have to choose between paying for medication or paying for the most basic communication needs.

Phone calls to the outside world provide respite for the incarcerated. They provide opportunity for individuals to advocate for themselves and take charge of their release and recovery plans. One of the cornerstones of substance use treatment is a supportive community, where those in recovery can access positive people, places, and things – this recovery process often starts inside of a jail. Planning important recovery steps can be difficult for incarcerated individuals who lack the finances to place needed calls; this can directly affect post-release success. Research shows that individuals who connect with supports while incarcerated, have better outcomes post release (Folk, et al. 2019).

In closing, I want to remind you that approximately 75% of most county jails are made up of pre-trial inmates, meaning they have not been found guilty or innocent of their alleged crime (Wagner & Jones, 2019). In a country that runs off the premise ‘innocent until proven guilty,’ why are we subjecting these individuals to isolation, confinement, and extreme barriers to accessing their own recovery, their own support, and release planning through excessive telephone charges? If the state of Maine truly wants to be a leader in reducing recidivism, we can make a positive step forward by passing LD 1175, An Act to Prohibit Excessive Telephone, Video, and Commissary Charges in Maine Jails and Prisons.

Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

## References

- Folk, B., Stuewig, J., Mashek, D., Tangney, J. & Grossman, J. (2019). Behind bars but connected to family: Evidence for the benefits of family contact during incarceration. *Journal of Family Psychology, 33*(4), 453-464. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/fam0000520>
- Wagner, P. & Jones, A. (2019). *State of Phone Justice: Local jails, state prisons, and private phone providers*. (Prison Policy Initiative Report). Retrieved from Prison Policy Initiative website:  
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