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To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Wendy Smith and I am currently incarcerated at Southern Maine Women's Re-entry Center in Windham Maine, where I am serving a 5 ½ year sentence.

I am more than just a resident of this facility. I am a woman in long term recovery from substance abuse disorder, I am a mother, wife, daughter, sister, and grandmother. My substance abuse led me down a path of self-destruction. Not only did I hurt myself, I hurt my community, and those that I love the most, my family. My substance use left me alone, isolated, almost dead, and finally incarcerated.

Being incarcerated, a lot of residents don't have the funds to call home. Until recently, I was one of those residents. I was not the only one that suffered. My children suffered by not being able to talk to their mother when they needed me the most. It left them wondering if I even cared about them anymore, not understanding that it costs the residents money to pick up the phone.

I am sure that \$1.50 don't seem like a lot to most people. Normally it wouldn't me either. But, in these circumstances, the inability to connect with my children, wife, and mother makes \$1.50 seem like a million dollars. How can one recover and rehabilitate without rebuilding and reestablishing connection with the ones they affected the most if they can't maintain communication with them due to lack of money? **THEY CAN'T!** The opposite of addiction is connection.

Lowering the cost of these 15-minute phone calls, and providing two free phone calls a week would provide a pathway to reconnect with children, family, and build a solid support foundation before release thus resulting in a successful re-entry and recovery. It would also take a little bit of the *financial burden off the* families that can manage to provide some funds to their loved one inside. I feel it is a small price to pay, to enhance a resident's chance for success and allow them to reconnect with their families, and be a parent to their children.

From experience, I can say that going without connecting with my family for a little over 2 years was the hardest thing that I had to do. It kept me isolated more than incarceration ever thought of, it kept me sick. I couldn't focus on myself, I had a constant worry, over-abundance of guilt, and left me unable to see my worth. My children struggled with anger, trouble in school, depression and anxiety. They have since expressed the worry that they experienced around my well-being, and

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wondered if I loved them anymore. I missed out on a lot of important conversations that as a mother, I should have been a part of.

My recovery and rehabilitation are my main focus. What that looks like for me is rebuilding broken connections with my children, my mother, my brother, and all those that I hurt. Most of all, it looks like rebuilding the connection within myself. I can't do that without the means to pick up the phone and call my support system, hearing my children's voice, and being the mother that they deserve. No one should have to pay money for that.

Thank you for taking the time to listen on the importance of reducing phone call rates, and providing two free phone calls a week to the residents inside. *Changing this would provide a pathway for connecting with loved ones, and building a foundational support system before re-entering back into the community. Help us along our journey.*

Sincerely,

Wendy Smith #94115