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POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

BILL: SB0948/ HB1366: State Correctional Facilities - Incarcerated Individuals - Costs of Telephone Communications

FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender

POSITION: Favorable

DATE: 3/5/2024

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender respectfully requests that the Committee issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 948/ House Bill 1366.

The Office of the Public Defender supports this proposed legislation because it promotes rehabilitation, and therefore reduces recidivism which makes our communities safer. For example, A 2014 study of incarcerated women found that those who had any phone contact with a family member were less likely to be reincarcerated within the five years after their release.¹

Having support from loved ones is an essential human need and vital for an individual's success. When incarcerated people stay connected to their support networks, they are able to play an active role in their own rehabilitation. They are also better able to plan for release, increasing their likelihood of reentering successfully and enhancing public safety.² The positive impacts are similar for families: Children do better at home and at school when they are able to maintain relationships with their parents in prison.³

Consistent family contact positively impacts the health and wellness of incarcerated people, their families, and safety more broadly.⁴ Free prison and jail communications will increase the ability of families to stay connected; which in turn will reduce recidivism rates, and improve parent-child relationships and mental and emotional health outcomes. Nevertheless, incarcerated people are currently charged 45 cents for a 15-minute phone call at state-run facilities.⁵ If they are permitted to work within the Division of Corrections, incarcerated people can make as little as \$2.16 per day (less

¹ Barrick, Lattimore, and Visher. "Reentering Women: The Impact of Social Ties on Long-Term Recidivism. The Prison Journal, Sage Publications (2014),

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.925.34&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

² Leah Wang. "Research roundup: The positive impacts of family contact for incarcerated people and their families," Prison Policy Initiatives (2021), https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/12/21/family_contact/

³ *Id.*

⁴ Leah Wang. "Research roundup: The positive impacts of family contact for incarcerated people and their families," Prison Policy Initiatives (2021), https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/12/21/family_contact/

⁵ "Prison & Jail Telecom Data," Worth Rises (2022), <https://connectfamiliesnow.com/data>

than 30 cents an hour for an 8 hour day).⁶ This means that often families must shoulder the burden of paying for communication, and many are forced to go into debt or cut ties altogether when they can no longer bear it.

Thousands of Maryland families struggle to afford to stay connected with their incarcerated loved ones without being trapped in a cycle of debt and poverty. In fact, about 65 percent of families with an incarcerated loved one struggle to meet basic housing and food needs.⁷ One in three families goes into debt just to stay in touch with a loved one behind bars, and women — largely families of color from marginalized communities — carry 87 percent of the burden.⁸

For these reasons, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender urges this Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 948/ House Bill 1366.

Submitted by: Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Government Relations Division.

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⁶ Fiscal and policy note for 2023 HB1123 https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2023RS/fnotes/bil_0003/hb1123.pdf f

⁷ *Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families*, Ella Baker Center, Forward Together, Research Action Design (2015), <https://ellabakercenter.org/who-pays-the-true-cost-of-incarceration-on-families>

⁸ *Id.*

