

**TESTIMONY ON HB1366
Incarcerated Individuals – Costs of Telephone Communications**

**House Judiciary Committee
March 7, 2024**

SUPPORT

Submitted by: **Magdalena Tsiongas, MPH**

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett and members of the Judiciary Committee:

I, Magdalena Tsiongas, am testifying in support of HB1366, Incarcerated Individuals – Costs of Telephone Communications. I am submitting this testimony as the family member of an incarcerated person in a Maryland prison, John.

John has served 17 years in prison. In 2020, John's mother shared with him over the phone, that she was sick, with what would be terminal cancer. As his mother deteriorated, the only way he could say goodbye to her, was over the phone. When his mother passed away, during the pandemic, there were no in person visits in the facility. The only way he could get in touch and grieve with his family was over the phone.

John has also been working on developing a relationship with his brother, who was just 8 when John was incarcerated. His brother is raising two young kids of his own, and his money needs to go to raising those boys, not paying just for the ability to speak with his brother.

There are no free forms of communication in prison. Writing letters cost stamps, sending emails on tablets costs money for family members. Visiting in person, can cost hundreds of dollars in gas, tolls, and even overnight stays for people whose loved ones are housed far away. For John, it's been over a decade since he has seen the majority of his family in person. Phone calls are the way that he maintains a relationship with his sister, brother and father.

In prison, "wages" if you can call them that are about 25 cents an hour. People incarcerated in Maryland cannot afford to pay for phone calls to their family, so the cost evidently falls on the families, families who already have to support their loved one's legal costs, clothing, hygiene products, snacks and more. Not to mention, providing for their family at home.

I spend hundreds of dollars on phone calls a month so that John and our family can speak with each other. I will keep doing it if I have to, because being able to maintain a relationship with your loved ones while incarcerated is one of the most important things. It maintains stability, love and hope in a hopeless place. But if phone calls were free, it would lift a huge burden off of family members of incarcerated people. No one should ever have to decide if they can afford to speak to their family member or not.

For these reasons, I encourage you to vote **favorably** on **HB1366**.

Thank you.