

April 11, 2024

TESTIMONY OF THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER (OPD) REGARDING:

House Bill No. 7525

ENTITLED, AN ACT RELATING TO CRIMINAL PROCEDURE – SENTENCE AND EXECUTION.

Chairman Craven and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

The OPD supports H7525, which seeks to repeal provisions allowing the Department of Corrections to charge inmates for phone calls and mandates the provision of free communication services to inmates and juveniles held in detention centers. Additionally, we applaud the requirement for these facilities to provide in-person contact visits.

The ability to communicate freely with loved ones is a fundamental right that should not be impeded because a person is indigent. Communication plays a crucial role in maintaining familial bonds, fostering rehabilitation, and facilitating successful reintegration into society upon release. However, the imposition of fees for phone calls disproportionately burdens already marginalized individuals and undermines their ability to stay connected with their support networks.

Moreover, the provision of free communication services and in-person contact visits is not only a matter of basic decency but also of public safety and justice. Maintaining strong ties with family and community reduces recidivism rates and promotes successful reentry into society. By ensuring access to these vital forms of communication and contact, H7525 aligns with principles of fairness, dignity, and rehabilitation.

The OPD strongly urges the Judiciary Committee to support H7525. This legislation represents a significant step towards promoting equity, rehabilitation, and humane treatment within our correctional and detention facilities.

Thank you for considering our perspective on this important matter. We stand ready to provide any further information or assistance you may require regarding this legislation.

Sincerely,

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