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October 5, 2021

The Honorable James B. Eldridge, Senate Chair
Joint Committee on the Judiciary
State House, Room 511-C
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Michael S. Day, House Chair
Joint Committee on the Judiciary
State House, Room 136
Boston, MA 02133

RE: *H.1900, An Act relative to telephone service for inmates in all correctional and other penal institutions in the Commonwealth*

Dear Chairman Eldridge, Chairman Day, and Members of the Joint Committee:

I write to express my support for H.1900, *An Act relative to telephone service for inmates in all correctional and other penal institutions in the Commonwealth*, filed by Representative Chynah Tyler.

This critical legislation would facilitate access to communication between those incarcerated and their families and friends by making phone calls and other forms of communication placed from our state prisons, jails, houses of corrections, and juvenile detention centers free. It would lift what can be a significant financial burden from prisoners and their families, who are often not able to afford the phone calls that allow them to stay connected.

Maintaining and fostering ties outside incarceration walls is critical for the well-being of prisoners, their loved ones, and their community. This ability to preserve and grow relationships is essential for successful rehabilitation and re-entry, and it therefore enhances public safety. In-person visits are not always feasible – particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic – and the telephone often functions as a lifeline to those incarcerated and their families. This legislation preserves our existing laws' protection of in-person contact visits, another means of maintaining family and community ties.

People of color and low-income individuals are substantially overrepresented among our incarcerated population, and the cost of these calls is disproportionately borne by communities of color. Additionally, we know that many of our incarcerated are parents or the primary caregivers

to young children and that sustaining connections between children and incarcerated caregivers can be critically important to preserving families and ensuring the wellbeing of vulnerable children.

However, it is also important to ensure that important programming for incarcerated individuals is not reduced or curtailed in any way. Currently, some of the sheriffs' departments programming for incarcerated individuals is funded, in part, by the fees generated from prison phone calls. Educational and vocational programming, as well as mental health and substance use disorder treatment, are vital to the mission of our corrections system and are critical to the well-being of incarcerated individuals and our communities. These supportive programs assist individuals in their personal growth and as they prepare for re-entry into the community.

I encourage the legislature to ensure, through appropriate funding, the maintenance of programming for incarcerated individuals that enhances the lives of incarcerated people and protects public safety, as well as the necessary security infrastructure to maintain a prison telephone system.

I urge the Committee to report this legislation favorably. And if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Anne Johnson Landry, Assistant Attorney General and Senior Policy Advisor, at (617) 963-2027.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Maura Healey", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Maura Healey