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October 21, 2021

The Honorable Walter F. Timilty, Senate Chair
Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security
State House, Room 213-B
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Carlos González, House Chair
Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security
State House, Room 26
Boston, MA 02133

RE: S1559, An Act relative to inmate telephone calls

Dear Chairman Timilty, Chairman González, and Members of the Joint Committee:

I write to express my support for *An Act relative to inmate telephone calls*, filed by Senator Cynthia Stone Creem.

This critical piece of legislation would facilitate access to communication between prisoners and their families, loved ones, and communities by making phone calls 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 it. Maintaining ties to family and loved ones is critical for the well-being of prisoners, their loved ones, and their community. This ability to maintain and grow relationships is essential for successful rehabilitation and re-entry; in fact, it enhances public safety. Significantly, phone calls and other forms of communication for incarcerated primary caregivers are vital tools to promote the well-being of children and families.

It is also significant that this legislation preserves our existing laws' protection of in-person contact visits, another means of maintaining family and community ties. But the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that in-person, contact visits are not always feasible, and that the telephone functions as a lifeline to prisoners and their families.

What this bill does not do is attach funding to implement this important reform. 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.

It is also important to note that the operation of a prison telephone system requires funding to support the technological security and management of those systems. I encourage the legislature to ensure through appropriate funding the maintenance of programming for incarcerated individuals that enhances the lives of prisoners 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.

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". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Maura Healey