



Human Rights Defense Center

DEDICATED TO PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS

March 29, 2017

SENT VIA EMAIL ONLY

Senator Cory A. Booker
United States Senate
359 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Support for the Dignity for Incarcerated Women Act

Dear Senator Booker:

The Human Rights Defense Center (HRDC) has worked to protect the human rights of people held in detention facilities in the United States for over 26 years, and we are pleased to strongly support the Dignity for Incarcerated Women Act (Act).

As the co-founder of the national Campaign for Prison Phone Justice (www.phonejustice.org), we have worked with the FCC to regulate the prison telecom industry which has, for far too long, been allowed to price gouge prisoners and their families for simply wanting to stay in touch. The Act would require the Bureau of Prisons to provide phone calls at no cost to federal prisoners, which would reduce the financial burden on their family members.

Additionally, HRDC has tracked the rise of video calling in prisons and jails, which is frequently provided at high costs and replaces in-person visitation. While we recognize the benefits of video calling for families unable to travel to correctional facilities for in-person visits, the video option should not include excessive rates nor should it replace in-person visits. The Act would require the BOP to provide video calling at no cost, which will facilitate greater communication between prisoners and their families and children – which, in turn, has been shown to result in better reentry outcomes for released prisoners and thus lower recidivism rates.

With today's technology there is no reason why prisoners held by the BOP should be charged for phone calls or video calling, and HRDC strongly supports the provisions of the Dignity for Incarcerated Women Act that require these services be provided at no cost, as well as provisions requiring the BOP to continue in-person visitation and ensure prisoners are housed in facilities as close to their children as possible, to encourage visits.

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The Dignity for Incarcerated Women Act includes many other socially-beneficial provisions that would improve the lives of federal prisoners and their families – including a ban on shackling pregnant prisoners, the provision of parenting classes to prisoners, ensuring that prisoners receive basic hygiene products, and expanding eligibility for substance abuse treatment to prisoners who are pregnant or were the primary caretakers of minor children.

We also applaud the Act's establishment of a pilot program for overnight visits from family members for prisoners who have displayed good behavior, although we believe that such a pilot program should also be extended to prisoners convicted of a crime of violence (as defined in sec. 16 of title 18 of the U.S. Code) that did not involve their family members.

For the foregoing reasons, among others, HRDC strongly endorses the Dignity for Incarcerated Women Act.

Sincerely,



Paul Wright
Executive Director, HRDC