



March 15, 2022

Members of the House Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform Finance and Policy Committee:

We are writing in support of HF 4191, HF 4215, HF 4224, and HF 3949. In 2020 the National Institute of Justice published a study on the impact of family visitation in Minnesota prisons stating, "Inmates visited at least once during their confinement had statistically significant lower risks of reconvictions and technical violation revocations compared with inmates never visited." We know from the experiences of our members and the calls and letters we receive from people in our state prisons that staying connected is invaluable for incarcerated people and their families. The same study showed that visitation from any mentor reduced the risk of felony reconviction by 29%.

Maintaining a connection to family and the outside world not only benefits incarcerated people in their recovery, but it helps to reduce the negative effects on the loved ones in our communities. Research from the University of Minnesota has shown that over half of the people in our prisons are parents, significantly higher than the national average. Another study found that on a single day in 2017, 69% of people in local jails were parents of a minor child. Data from the Minnesota Student Survey showed 1 in 6 children in Minnesota have experienced a parent being incarcerated. Similar research has shown that these children have negative long-term outcomes in health, academics, and involvement in the juvenile justice system compared to their peers without an incarcerated parent. In addition to the large body of research on this topic, we know simply from experience that meaningful social and family connections are indispensable in the process of recovering from a mental illness.

We strongly support the appropriations to create a family support unit in the Department of Corrections and to fund communications with support persons in HF 4191. We also support the funding in HF 4215 to support incarcerated people in obtaining employment after release. Employment is another important element in many people's recovery, especially for formally incarcerated people facing collateral consequences of felony records. We support the funding to assist Native women in HF 4224. More culturally competent treatment and support is desperately needed in our state, and given the disparate representation of Indigenous people in our corrections system, this funding is imperative.

Finally, NAMI Minnesota was a champion of the legislation to reopen the Office of the Ombuds for Corrections in 2019. We support HF 3949 as an important safeguard to keep the Office open and provide an essential avenue for people in the corrections system to voice concerns and complaints – incarcerated people and corrections officers alike. Ensuring that we have the highest quality corrections system possible should not be a matter that changes from administration to administration. Thank you for hearing these important bills, we hope you will support these investments to benefit people with mental illnesses in our corrections system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sue Abderholden".

Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elliot Butay".

Elliot Butay
Criminal Justice Coordinator



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