

LETTER IN SUPPORT OF HF 4191

As experienced pediatricians and a parent educator, we are well aware of the tremendous importance of parents in a child's life. At every age, a child's connection to one or both parents is a lifeline. This is especially true for babies and toddlers who rely heavily on parents as teachers and as caregivers. Their world is limited and a parent is often at the very center.

When a parent suddenly, at least from a child's viewpoint, leaves the family, a child's world is torn apart. Babies and young children might become fussy, eat and sleep poorly, and become withdrawn. Progress in learning and developing relationships comes to a standstill.

As Dr Rebecca Schlafer at the University of Minnesota points out, older children are at risk for internalizing their feelings with depression, anxiety or withdrawal. Externalizing behaviors might include aggression, delinquency, substance use, health problems, or academic failure.

In an effort to reduce the short and longer term effects of having an incarcerated parent, establishing a family support unit can direct attention to this long neglected issue. For a child, being able to interact with a parent via Zoom or a phone call can assure them that the parent still exists and that he or she remains vitally interested in the child's well being.

In Minnesota, the majority of inmates are parents of minor children, lived with the children prior to incarceration, and intend to do so after discharge. Attention to this family connection while incarcerated can reap benefits now and in years to come.

Thank you.

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