



**Testimony in Support of Colorado House Bill 25-1013
Concerning Social Visitation Rights for a Person Confined in a Correctional Facility**

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February 5, 2025

Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. My name is Sarah Staudt, and I am the Director of Policy and Advocacy at Prison Policy Initiative. Prison Policy Initiative is a national non-profit that provides research and advocacy to expose the harms of mass incarceration.

The Prison Policy Initiative strongly supports House Bill 25-1013, an Act concerning Social Visitation Rights for a Person Confined in a Correctional Facility. Contact with the community outside prison walls is essential for the human rights and rehabilitation of people behind bars, and research has shown numerous positive benefits to increased visitation. Visitation has been shown to decrease recidivism, improve in-facility behavior, increase the likelihood of post-release employment, and strengthen family bonds. It is also essential not only for incarcerated people, but for their families and especially their children. Prison Policy Initiative has reviewed copious amounts of research on this topic, and I would like to briefly summarize some of that research for you today.

First, visitation has been shown to reduce recidivism after release. A [2022 study](#) showed that experiencing prison visitation correlated with a 25% reduction in the likelihood of being rearrested within 2 years after release. The greater the frequency of visits, the greater the impact of recidivism. This study also showed that there was a stronger effect for visits in minimum security settings than maximum security ones, suggesting that visits that allow more contact and fewer rules have a greater positive effect. This suggests that not only would House Bill 25-1013 improve the lives of incarcerated people in Colorado; it would also make Colorado safer in the long run.

Second, visitation improves the likelihood of employment after release. This is likely because visitation strengthens ties with family and friends, who are instrumental in helping returning citizens secure employment. A [2022 study](#) showed that people experiencing their first incarceration who had family visitation had odds of finding employment almost 2 times higher than those who were not visited by family.

Visitation does not only benefit people who are incarcerated; it is also essential for their families and social communities, particularly children. Nationwide, [half of people in prison](#) are parents to

minor children, including 80% of all incarcerated women. Incarceration is a stressor for children that affects wellbeing, family dynamics, poor school performance, and a heightened risk of involvement in the criminal legal system. Maintaining contact – and particularly in-person visitation – [has been shown](#) to lessen these negative outcomes. Making sure that visitation is a right for people in Colorado prisons will make the thousands of children in Colorado with a parent in prison more likely to succeed. The fact that removal of visitation can currently be used as a punishment for even minor disciplinary violations increases the uncertainty around whether an incarcerated person can receive visits, which likely discourages families from visiting.

Lastly, increased visitation has positive impacts on both incarcerated people and prison staff by decreasing mental health problems behind bars. Encouraging social supports through visitation [has been shown](#) to help incarcerated people better cope with the inherent stressors of incarceration by increasing incarcerated people’s optimism about their own lives.

The research is clear: increasing visitation for incarcerated people benefits all Coloradans by improving safety and helping Colorado’s children. We urge the legislature to support House Bill 25-1013.