

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 2, 2016

Media Contact:

Zaineb Mohammed

Zaineb@ellabakercenter.org or 510-285-8236

Bill to prohibit California jails from eliminating in-person visitation passes Senate

Sacramento, CA - The California Senate approved a bill authored by Sen. Holly Mitchell (D-Los Angeles) to prohibit California jails from eliminating in-person visits. SB 1157, the Strengthening Family Connections: In-Person Visitation bill, would preserve visitation rights for people in California county jails, juvenile facilities, and private facilities by clarifying that video technology cannot replace in-person visits. After passing the Senate 32-6 with bipartisan support, SB 1157 now heads to the Assembly.

At least eleven counties in California have eliminated, plan to eliminate, or severely restrict in-person visitation in at least one of their jails. Since the implementation of public safety realignment in California, more people are serving time in county jails and for longer periods of time than ever before.

“Video visitation will never be the same as an in-person visit,” said Zoe Wilmott, Program Manager of Essie Justice Group, a cosponsor of SB 1157. “In jails that have replaced in-person visitation with video, families no longer get a real visit. Instead, they travel to the correctional facility to visit with a grainy computer image of their incarcerated loved one.”

A 2014 Department of Justice report found that when a person is incarcerated, even for a short period of time, family contact and in-person visits are crucial to maintaining family stability, reducing disciplinary infractions and violence, reducing recidivism, increasing the chances of obtaining employment post-release, and facilitating successful reentry.

“The Legislature has spent a great deal of time grappling with this issue of humane treatment of people in CA jails,” said Sen. Mitchell when presenting the bill. “We have approved funding to reduce overcrowding, improve educational and rehabilitative services, and reduce recidivism. We would be going backwards to now eliminate a basic human right — in-person visitation. Maintaining familial relationships is key to their success once released.”

Although video visitation can be a convenient supplement to in-person visitation, particularly when people are imprisoned far from their families and networks of support, remote video visits are cost-prohibitive for many families, and many low-income families do not have access to computers or high-speed internet.

SB 1157 is co-sponsored by the Friends Committee on Legislation of California, the Women’s Foundation of California Women’s Policy Institute, CIVIC, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights,

Legal Services for Prisoners with Children, Project WHAT!, A New Way of Life Reentry Project, Essie Justice Group, and Prison Law Office

For more information: <http://nationinside.org/campaign/strengthening-family-connections/>

#####