

## Testimony to the Colson Study

My name is Charles Sullivan and I am President of International CURE (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants). We are an organization of people incarcerated and their loved ones.

We deal daily with the three ways of communication that prisons and jails provide in this country. The three ways are correspondence, phoning and visiting.

Today, we would like to suggest some practical and little-cost policy changes in these three areas that the BOP could implement immediately that would enhance their rehabilitative impact.

### Correspondence

The most important reform needed is to have BOP facilities (and jail and halfway houses where BOP has contracts) have a stringent policy that mail received by a person incarcerated is forwarded.

Why? The first reason is that *forwarding is part of the first class stamp or stamps!* Secondly, the letter could contain most important communication with a *family especially a prisoner writing her or his children*. Thirdly, there could be *vital reentry information* such as a halfway house placement or employment upon release.

Thus, prisons and jails should have forwarding applications available in cell blocks, day rooms, etc. to all prisoners ready to have a change of address. Also, there should be a big sign near the

applications saying *Fill this out to get your mail sent to you if you are being transferred or being released!*

### Phoning

Although we appreciate that the BOP has a pro-family policy in regard to phones, it could be much more family-friendly. Why is any money made off the phones? Why couldn't skype be used especially for the thousands of people in the BOP from other countries? Might there rehabilitation mean that they might not come to the U.S.

### Visiting

In-person visiting should never be discouraged and we would like to give a "shout-out" to Director Samuels and the BOP for encouraging more family visiting. By the way, I should have also congratulated the BOP in the previous sections for its TRULING program which allows limited email by people incarcerated.

As for visiting, we would like to recommend that a staffer is always available in person or by phone during visiting hours to handle an *informal appeal* if a person is denied a visit.

As baby-boomers and others older like myself age, we are more forgetful. Thus, we may have left an ID at home and traveled hundreds of miles to visit a loved one. Our visit may not happen and there is no appeal.

I'm not saying that security be compromised. I'm simply suggesting that the visit is so important that maybe "something can be worked out." A staffer on deck with this authority would go a long

way to making the visit the most important event in the life of a person incarcerated as well as those loved ones coming to visit.

Secondly, we again applaud the BOP for its goal of trying to place a person incarcerated near as possible to her or his family. In this regard, the Interstate Corrections Compact should be utilized in a routine manner. For example, placing an incarcerated parent near her or his children may be more important for the children who are really the forgotten victims of the crime.

I will conclude that CURE started in 1972 by my wife, Pauline, and myself. Although now a policy advocacy organization, we began in San Antonio with a bus service for families to visit loved ones in the Texas prisons.

Also, we did bus trips to Leavenworth and La Tuna federal facilities. Back then, the visits could be many hours of a few days and meals could be ordered from a nearby "free world" restaurant to be eaten in the visiting room. It was truly a wonderful occasion treasured by all who participated.

Academia reinforced this experience. A study in 1972 was done by the California Department of Corrections that said that visiting for a person incarcerated results in a six times less recidivism rate.

Phoning and email did not exist then. But with these new tools as well as the old, the BOP should be a model for the country and the world that a person is sent to prison as punishment and not for punishment.

Also, the keys to not returning are strong family and community support as well as an

employable skill that results in a family, living and saving wage. Having correspondence, phoning and visiting as top priorities are the means to bring about this effective rehabilitation.

Charles Sullivan, President, International CURE, PO Box 2310, Washington DC 20013 202-789-

2126 [cure@curenational.org](mailto:cure@curenational.org)