



**FAMILY FORWARD**  
**OREGON**

*Smart policies for today's families.*

April 7, 2015

Testimony in Support of SB 939: Maintaining Family Relationships During Incarceration  
Submitted by Kate Newhall, Family Forward

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 939, which will help maintain family relationships during incarceration. **Family Forward believes that if we want to break the cycle of poverty and incarceration in Oregon we must look for ways to better support children with parents in the criminal justice system.** Promoting strong familial ties, both in prison and after release, reduces recidivism and increases parental involvement, which helps children of incarcerated parents succeed.

Family Forward is an organization committed to advancing policies that support families and help them succeed, both in the workplace and at home. Our mission is to create a family-forward Oregon where all families can be economically secure and have the time it takes for family responsibilities. Family Forward supports policies, like maintaining familial relationships and providing parental support during incarceration, that promote strong families and make economic stability more achievable.

The nation's growing prison and jail population has raised serious questions about the collateral effects of incarceration on children, families and communities. **Whatever one's views about the appropriate role of incarceration in the criminal justice system, it is clear that imprisonment disrupts positive, nurturing relationships between many parents—particularly mothers—and their children.** In addition, many families with children suffer economic strain and instability when a parent is imprisoned. Supporting strong familial ties while incarcerated will preserve and strengthen positive family connections; it will also yield many positive benefits in the form of reduced recidivism, less intergenerational criminal justice system involvement, and promote healthy child development.

In an era of mass incarceration, where the United States makes up 5 percent of the world's population but has 25 percent of the world's prison population, we must make changes to how we shape public policy. **The status quo is clearly not working.**

We know that children of incarcerated parents are more likely to drop out of school, engage in delinquency, and subsequently be incarcerated themselves. We also know that parental involvement is critical to a child's success. Yet we provide minimal support to incarcerated parents to help them maintain regular, meaningful contact with their children while incarcerated.



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Children of incarcerated parents live in a variety of circumstances. Some were previously in homes of two-parent families, where the non-incarcerated parent can assume primary responsibility for the children. Many children, especially in cases of women's incarceration, were in single-parent homes and are then cared for by a grandparent or other relative, or in foster care. The large-scale women's imprisonment in our state and across the country has resulted in an increasing number of children who experience economic insecurity. Mothers are now the primary or sole breadwinners in nearly 40 percent of families nationwide. As we continue to imprison increasing numbers of women and mothers, this has grave effects for the families who depend on them.

**Maintaining strong relationships between parents and their children during incarceration is a critical part of ensuring these families succeed post-release - and that children are able to stay with their parents and out of foster care.**

Programs that facilitate contact and interaction between the incarcerated parent and their children, as envisioned in SB 939 will help keep familial bonds strong and together. We urge your support of SB 939.