



**Testimony of Kimberly McCullough, Policy Director  
In Support of SB 241  
House Committee on Judiciary  
May 10, 2017**

Chair Barker and Members of the Committee:

The American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon<sup>1</sup> supports SB 241, which would establish a Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents. As a nonpartisan organization dedicated to preservation and enhancement of civil liberties and civil rights, the ACLU of Oregon supports efforts that protect the rights of children impacted by the criminal justice system.

In Oregon, approximately 70,000 children currently have an incarcerated parent. Nationally, 1 in 14 children is affected by parental incarceration. Children with incarcerated parents frequently experience trauma: they lose their primary caregiver, they are forced to change homes and schools, and they lack adequate resources. Often children develop emotional and behavioral problems related to the loss of a parent which can persist into adulthood manifested in mental and physical health issues, as well as a higher likelihood of incarceration.

SB 241 will ensure that every child whose parent is arrested and/or incarcerated is guaranteed rights that will protect their needs, including the right to be informed of the arrest in an age-appropriate manner and the right to speak with, see, and touch the incarcerated parent. These rights are fundamental to assure that the needs and best interests of children with incarcerated parents are included in the decision-making processes in the criminal justice system.

Addressing the unique needs of children with incarcerated parents will interrupt the intergenerational cycles of criminal justice involvement and create safer communities and healthier families. Children who are able to maintain their relationship with their parent while that parent is incarcerated tend to do better in school and have fewer health and behavior problems. And incarcerated parents who are allowed to maintain relationships with their children are less likely to re-offend than those who don't have this opportunity.

For these reasons, the ACLU of Oregon urges you to support SB 241.

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<sup>1</sup> The American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon (ACLU of Oregon) is a nonprofit organization with more than 40,000 members in the State of Oregon.