

Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections Committee Testimony  
March 5, 2025 9:30 am

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify in favor of the Governor's Budget Proposal on Reentry Programs and Services.

My name is Alfred Cleveland and I am here to testify on behalf of the families of those who are incarcerated—families who have committed no crime yet endure the consequences as if they had.

During my time in prison, I experienced firsthand how critical access to communication is for both incarcerated individuals and their loved ones. One night, I desperately needed to call my wife about urgent legal matters, but the phones had been taken over by gangs on the unit. They controlled access, passing the phones amongst themselves while others, like me, were left waiting indefinitely. That night, I was pushed into a situation that could have escalated into violence, threatening my chances at parole after 22 years of incarceration. But a kind and selfless individual stepped in—he gave me the phone, de-escalating a situation that could have changed the course of my future.

Two months later, new technology was introduced, providing tablets in one room, which allowed for more communication options. This single change reduced nearly 70% of the violence caused by conflicts over phone access. It was a clear and direct example of how improving access to communication can create a safer environment within the facilities.

Today, I urge this committee to increase the budget allocation for GTL services to provide more free or low-cost calls and video communication for incarcerated individuals and their families. Staying connected with our loved ones is not a luxury—it is a necessity. Strong family connections help reduce violence in prisons and play a critical role in successful reintegration upon release.

By investing in accessible communication services, we can reduce harm, strengthen communities, and improve the chances of rehabilitation for those returning home. Thank you for your time and consideration. I respectfully submit this testimony and welcome any questions.