Chairman, Vice Chair, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jason Dobbins, and I am submitting testimony in opposition to House Bill 338.

I am not writing as an attorney, politician, or corrections expert. I am writing as someone who has a close friend incarcerated in Ohio and who has personally witnessed the positive impact that communication, family connections, educational resources, and rehabilitative opportunities have had on his mental health and overall well-being.

One of my greatest concerns regarding House Bill 338 is the potential impact it could have on incarcerated individuals housed in higher security levels, particularly Level 4 facilities.

Many people do not realize that these individuals already spend nearly 24 hours a day confined to their cells. Their daily lives are incredibly restricted, and opportunities for meaningful human interaction are limited. When someone is living under those conditions, maintaining connections to the outside world becomes even more important.

For many incarcerated individuals, tablets are not a luxury. They are one of the few tools available to help them stay connected, continue learning, access programming, and maintain some sense of hope and purpose.

My friend has relied on tablet communication to stay connected with people who care about him. Through messages, educational materials, religious resources, and other programming, I have watched him develop a more positive outlook and a healthier mindset. These resources have given him something constructive to focus on during long periods of isolation.

The changes I have seen in his mental health have been significant.

Instead of focusing only on the negativity of incarceration, he has been able to focus on self-improvement, personal growth, and maintaining relationships with people who encourage him to keep moving forward. Communication with family and friends provides emotional support that simply cannot be replaced.

I am also concerned about the impact this bill could have on contact visitation.

For incarcerated individuals who spend the vast majority of their lives behind a cell door, those visits are often the most meaningful moments they experience. The contact they receive is already extremely limited. In many cases, it consists of a brief hug at the beginning of the visit and another brief hug at the end.

To most people, that may not seem like much.

To someone who spends nearly every day isolated from normal human interaction, those moments mean everything.

Those hugs remind them they are still loved. They remind them they have people waiting for them. They remind them they are still human.

Reducing access to communication and contact visitation does not improve rehabilitation. It risks increasing isolation, hopelessness, depression, and mental health struggles among individuals who are already living under some of the most restrictive conditions within our correctional system.

Throughout my friendship, I have witnessed firsthand how access to communication, educational resources, religious materials, and family support has positively influenced my friend's mental health. These tools have encouraged growth, accountability, and hope.

I respectfully ask this committee to consider the impact House Bill 338 could have on incarcerated individuals and the people who care about them. Maintaining communication, preserving contact visitation, and protecting access to rehabilitative resources are important not only for the individuals who are incarcerated but also for the safety, stability, and success of our communities when those individuals eventually return home.

Please oppose House Bill 338 as written, or amend it to protect visitation, tablet access, educational opportunities, religious programming, and family connections.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Jason Dobbins