

Testimony in Support of HB 3078

Submitted to the House Committee on Judiciary

April 12, 2017

Chair Barker and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

For the record, my name is Brittney Wilson.

I work with youth ages 7-14 who have a parent involved in the criminal justice system, and I relate to those kids on a number of levels. As a child, both of my parents were in and out of my life due to addiction. Addiction caused my parents to commit crimes in order to support not only their habits but also to feed, clothe, and provide for me and my siblings.

Having one or both of your parents incarcerated for any amount of time is an extremely traumatic and isolating experience. My parents' absence caused unstable living situations: I was passed around from family member to family member, then to friends of the family, then to strangers who were willing to open their door to me. I never unpacked because I was never sure where I would be the next day.

No consistent address also meant that I couldn't receive letters from my parents, and there were long periods where I had no contact with them. I couldn't travel to visit them on my own, and my various guardians were so busy and overloaded that no one was available to take me. During those periods, I would often slip into depression. Not talking or eating, just lying in bed all day unable to get my mind to stop: were my parents safe, warm, hungry? Were my parents thinking about me? And above all, did my parents still love and care about me?

I know that the adult perspective is different. You who make public safety laws are trying to make communities better, but for children, having parents incarcerated makes you feel robbed. I felt robbed of really ever knowing my parents and robbed of a real childhood in a way that continues to affect me today. Children of incarcerated parents eventually grow up, and the fear, anger, and pain stay with us for the rest of our lives. I walked through majority of my childhood thinking no one really cared, and what was the point: after all I was just going to end up like my parents anyways, right?

My mother has often said that her many trips to jail and prison only hindered her and made her more angry. It was not until she received intensive drug and alcohol treatment that she began to take accountability for her actions and her life. Alternatives to prison saved my mother's life, which in turn gave mine back to me.

I support HB 3078 because I've seen how addiction services treat the underlying reasons for incarceration. And these programs don't just benefit the parent; they benefit the whole family so that parents and children are given the opportunity to know each other, to be whole, and to thrive.

Thank you.