

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/prison-visiting-a-poor-target-for-budget-cuts>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Each year around Mothers Day and Fathers Day, newspapers typically run human interest articles about prison visiting programs that help connect children with their incarcerated parents. In California, for example, the [Get on the Bus program](#) facilitates such visits.

Beyond the heartwarming human interest inherent in these efforts, however, there are important social and public safety implications for fostering family connections: as [research](#) has shown, prison visitation not only helps improve safety within prisons, but also helps incarcerated people and their children have better outcomes when they return home. Yet these days, as states contend with difficult budgetary decisions, the news about prison visiting trends in a different direction. The narrative follows the flow of dollars and cents.

Last week, the [Washington Post](#) editorial board spoke out against a policy change in the Washington, DC Department of Corrections shifting visitation to video instead of in-person encounters. Visitors still have to travel to the jail, but when they arrive they will sit in front of a monitor rather than face-to-face with the incarcerated person they've come to see. [Corrections officials](#) cite cost savings as a reason for the policy change.

Eliminating ways for people to stay connected to their incarcerated loved ones often carries costs beyond those that appear on a budget. Yesterday, the [Wall Street Journal](#) ran an Associated Press story on the impact that a 2011 decision by the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision to stop running free buses to New York State prisons has had on families who relied on the program and cannot afford to make the trip without it. The article drew on a Vera report written for the New York State Assembly.

Given that visiting benefits incarcerated people, their families, and safety inside correctional facilities, it is troubling that opportunities to visit are decreasing and those that remain are growing more expensive.

Do you know of corrections systems using creative ways to increase opportunities to visit?

Please contribute to the discussion below to share what you are seeing. If you need a reminder of why this matters, [these images](#) say it all.

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

Vera Institute of Justice. All rights reserved.