

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/the-best-kind-of-tie-for-fathers-day>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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On Sunday, families around the country will celebrate Fathers Day in their own traditional way. Of course, this is a big day for retailers, though what is often lost through the holidays commercialization is the rationale behind its existence in the first place: to celebrate and reinforce the bond between father and child. Unfortunately for kids whose fathers are incarcerated, the holiday serves as a reminder that their dad is not around. Holidays certainly aren't the only time that children are reminded of this separation, but such occasions underscore the importance of implementing innovative, family-focused practices into visitation policies and procedures at jails and prisons.

One innovation, a mobile visitation bus, helps to alleviate some of the challenges that prevent many families from visiting loved ones in person. Harvard University's [Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation](#) recently listed this program, launched in 2008 by the [Pinellas County Sheriff's Office](#) in Florida, as one of the top 25 innovations in government. Long waiting times and congestion at the central video visitation center prompted Sheriff Jim Coats to spearhead an effort to install visitation workstations (complete with Wi-Fi, laptops, and cameras) in the buses, which now travel to four locations in Pinellas County and can accommodate up to 100 visits per week.

Even though video exchanges should serve as a complement to visitation rather than a substitute, they can be extremely valuable to family members who are unable to travel long distances. When agencies establish innovative family-focused practices as the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office has done, they help strengthen the bond between children and incarcerated parents and may offer some kids the opportunity to enjoy a holiday in the future, rather than lament it.

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