

Effects and Re-imagining of In-Person Visitation: Support for AB964  
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## Introduction

Everyone deserves the opportunity to hug the people they love. However, incarceration prevents families from being able to embrace each other; an embrace is something that most of us take for granted. Prison in-person visitation is the only way that a mother can hold her son in her arms. Every mother deserves this opportunity, so every jail should have an in-person visitation room. However, some jails began to implement video calling, which led them to then remove the option of in-person visitation. In 2016, Governor Brown signed AB 103, which prohibited jails with in-person visitation rooms from converting solely to video visits after January 1st, 2017 (AB103, 2019). While this bill seemed like a success for the preservation of in-person visitation, this bill had a loophole. Any jails that already had plans to convert, or to continue, with video calls only that existed before January of 2017, did not have to create an in-person visitation facility. This led Assembly Member Jose Medina to write AB964, which will “require all local detention facilities to offer in-person visitation. The bill would give any facility that does not offer in-person visitation until January 1, 2025, to comply with this requirement” (Jose Medina, 2019). The passing of this bill would mean that the option of in-person visitation at corrections facilities would be standardized across the state. This bill is incredibly important because the effects of in-person visitation have been widely researched and are found to be beneficial. The lack of in-person visitation will be particularly crucial in the Inland Empire because many low income, people of color live and are incarcerated here. This demographic of people will be most affected by the lack of in-person because they will be charged the high costs of video calls, which can be up to \$12.50 an hour. In the cities of Riverside and Corona, an

organization, Starting Over Inc, is working on gaining support for AB964 in order to combat the removal of in-person visitation in California state and county jails. I have found that the benefits of in-person visitation have been vastly researched, so I researched that in-person visitation should not only be offered at every jail, but improved so that families can maximize their opportunity to see, sit with, and hug each other. Changes to in-person visitation should include an allowance to show emotion, argue, and cry. They should have access to regular height tables, safe visiting room temperatures, murals on the walls, and variance in seating arrangement. Prisons should not frisk children and should provide clean areas with activities and coloring options for parents and children to do together. In paper, I will explain the setting in which I did my research and why the Inland Empire will be especially impacted by lack of prison in-person visitation rooms, review the published literature on positive effects of in-person visitation as well as features that are working well, and offer my own research on the positive effects of in-person visitation as well as how to overall improve visitation experience.

## **Research Setting**

Imagine if visiting an incarcerated loved one was as easy as and accessible as FaceTiming a friend. The struggle of people who are trying to visit loved ones in prison affects hundreds of thousands. It is difficult for many to visit their incarcerated loved ones. If they are unable or cannot afford to travel, they would be excluded from seeing their loved ones. Securus, a company that provides calling services for families of incarcerated people, is now offering video calling. This will allow those who are physically unable to make it into prisons, due to physical limitations or otherwise, to still have an opportunity to see the face of their incarcerated

loved one. A video calling option will also greatly benefit those that are located geographically far away from their incarcerated loved one and cannot afford the travel expenses. Through video calling, families will have the opportunity to see the face of their loved one.

While video visitation sounds like a helpful addition to prison visitation, the California legislature has actually allowed for video calls to become the only form of face-to-face prison visitation. Prison and jail facilities have been built without in-person visitation rooms. Large companies such as Securus that have introduced video calls are not concerned if they will be in addition to in-person visitation. Securus stands to make huge profits from the implementation of video visitation because each call will cost families about \$12.50 for a half-hour. This can end up being more costly for some families than in-person visitation. Because of the video calling option, some facilities have now been built without a physical in-person visitation space. There is countless research on the positive effects of in-person visitation on both incarcerated people and their families, yet prison facilities have been transformed to trade the in-person visit option for the more lucrative video calling. Video-calling should only be offered in addition to in-person visitation so that families can choose which method they can access and afford. Also, the lack of in-person visitation denies incarcerated people and their families the ability ever to embrace and touch each other. This also means that people are not able to check in on the physical state of their loved one: make sure that they are eating enough, not being abused, etc. It is impossible to see someone's size or identify bruises over a video call. There is no substitute for the positive effects of touch, and families that are impacted by incarceration should not be denied.

Those that will be most affected by the removal of in-person visitation are those that are low income and people of color. Because the prison industrial complex is set up such that this is

the community of people that end up behind bars. Low income, people of color are primarily the population that will be denied access to physically visiting their loved ones. However, many people, including those that are incarcerated, do not believe that racism plays any role in the prison industrial complex. In *Prison and Social Death*, the author tells of discriminatory treatment that people receive in prison. One woman of color does not receive proper health care, yet “she does not think racism is involved” (Price, 2015, 5).

The lack of in-person visitation will be particularly crucial in the Inland Empire because many low income, people of color live and are incarcerated here. The Inland Empire has a significant number of prisons and a massive population of incarcerated people. It is also host to several other social and environmental issues, including pollution and food scarcity. The plethora of warehouses in the Inland Empire employ low income, people of color that reside there. These warehouses overwork them and offer them unfair wages for their labor. Also, the pollution from the warehouses creates some of the worst air quality in the country, while the space that they occupy allows for little agriculture to be supported in the area. Many immigrants have also settled in the Inland Empire, but they are not welcomed or supported by our current government (Davis, 2003 & De Lara, 2018).

In response to the issues that riddle the Inland Empire, many grassroots organizations have started movements in hopes of affecting and implementing change. In the Cities of Riverside and Corona, an organization, Starting Over Inc, is working to combat the lack of in-person visitation facilities in California state and county jails. There is a bill, AB 964, that will stop video call only from being allowed in state and county jails and mandate that in-person visitation is an available option. This bill is driven by families of incarcerated people and

grassroots organizations such as Starting Over Inc, which was started by Vonya Quarles, who is a system impacted person herself. Vonya is one of the only previously incarcerated people practicing law in the Inland Empire and was integral in starting the Riverside chapter of All of Us or None (Starting).

Starting Over Inc is an organization of people that are directly impacted by incarceration. They are passionate and vigilant about policy issues such as AB964, and I became involved in advocating for AB964 through my internship at Starting Over Inc this semester. I would travel with them to visit those incarcerated to raise awareness for AB964. Each time I get dressed in the morning for a day in jail, two readings spin in my head. The first is the reading, *Through the Gates*, in which the author discusses that she “created [her] own prison uniform” (Imarisha, 2016, 9). I spent so much thought on my outfit for the first time that I was getting dressed, that it is now the outfit I wear every time I go to my internship. There is no wire or metal on my body, and the clothes are professional but also casual. Besides dressing for the prison guards to approve me, I also think a lot about my appearance because I worry that I will look out of place if I have too many signifiers of wealth. I take off my apple watch and my two diamond necklaces that I wear every day. I thought a lot about how I did not want to make anyone uncomfortable. I was embarrassed to be leaving a lovely condominium home in my own car, which is all paid for by my parents. I did not do anything to deserve the life I live, and the same is true for many of the inmates. I try to lean into this feeling of discomfort and think about Ijeoma Oluo’s words in *So You Want To Talk About Race*. “When we identify that our privilege intersects with somebody else’s oppression, we’ll find our opportunities to make real change” (Oluo, 2020, 9), and I hope that I am using my opportunity well.

## Literature Review

In addition to the knowledge I acquired from the Starting Over Inc staff, my interviewees, and the community, in order to inform my understanding of video visitation, AB964, the benefits of in-person visitation, and visitations impact on children, I first turned to the prior research that exists in these areas. This allowed me to situate my work, as well as to understand and identify that in-person visitation benefits are well researched, so improving visitation should be included in my research as an addition to existing literature.

### Video Visitation & Legislation

Many jails across the state are offering video visitation to the families of incarcerated people. This began to pose a threat to in-person visits. “‘In-person visit’ means an on-site visit that may include barriers. In-person visits include interactions in which an inmate has physical contact with a visitor, the inmate is able to see a visitor through a barrier, or the inmate is otherwise in a room with a visitor without physical contact” (Medina, 2019). Typically, jail facilities in the city have glass visitation while prisons upstate allow touch visitation. “‘Video visitation’ means interaction between an inmate and a member of the public through the means of an audio-visual communication device when the member of the public is located at a local detention facility or at a remote location.” (Medina, 2019). Video visitation is so popular with corrections facilities that “74% of jails that introduce video calls would eventually eliminate and ban in-person visitation. However, in 2016, Governor Brown signed AB 103, which prohibited jails with in-person visitation rooms from converting solely to video visits after January 1,

2017” (AB103, 2019). While this bill seemed like a success for the preservation of in-person visitation, this bill had a loophole. Any jails that already had plans to convert, or to continue, with video calls only that existed before January of 2017, did not have to create an in-person visitation facility. This loophole led Assembly Member Jose Medina to write AB964, which will “require all local detention facilities to offer in-person visitation. The bill would give any facility that does not offer in-person visitation until January 1, 2025, to comply with this requirement” (Medina, 2019). This bill is a two-year bill that will be re-introduced when the legislature convenes in 2020. The passing of this bill would mean that the option of in-person visitation at corrections facilities would be standardized across the state. Many are fighting to preserve in-person visitation as an option in every corrections facility because the effects of in-person visitation are very positive and improve prisoner well being, behavior, recidivism, and it also can prove beneficial for the families of incarcerated people.

### Effects on Prisoners Well Being

Research suggests that prisoners benefit from visitation. Prisoners who have frequent visitors experience a rapid decrease in rates of depression (Claire, 2016,188). Partner visitation appears to increase well being of those incarcerated. The positive effects of visitation also extend to younger prisoners when their parents visit them. One study found that “male adolescents receiving more visits from their parents experienced a significantly quicker reduction in depressive symptoms than those who did not. Further, when those relationships were of a higher quality, the adolescents had significantly fewer symptoms of depression.” (Claire, 2016, 196). Visitation alleviates depression because it affords incarcerated people the opportunity to

“preserve or restore relationships that have been severed by imprisonment.” (Mears, 2012, 6).

Visitation provides a “source of support for coping with and surviving prison” (Mears, 2012, 6).

Those that rely on their families and partners for mental and emotional support, as most of us do in our daily lives, can continue doing so through in-person visitation.

### Effects on Prisoners Behavior

Studies have shown that there is a correlation between prisoners having visitors and their behavior. While non-visited prisoners are more likely to misbehave in prison, visited prisoners are more likely to maintain good behavior. The risk of misbehaving “declined in the 3 weeks leading up to a visit, and just before the visit, it is 48% lower than baseline probability.” Additionally, contraband infractions were reported “77% lower the week before” a scheduled visit. Finally, an inmate’s likelihood of defiance also drops “36% lower the week before” (Claire, 2016, 194). Consistently visited prisoners essentially were “never in the high misconduct group” (Claire, 2016, 195). The increase in good behavior can be explained through the fact that visits are taken away if prisoners misbehave. So, visited inmates have a motivation to behave well in order to see their families.

### Effects on Recidivism

Most of the research done on this topic has been limited and uses small sample sizes without employing multivariable models, so there is a need for more studies on how to reduce recidivism. Although research performed is limited, there is an express agreement among scholars that in-person visitation or “pro-social abilities while incarcerated lead to lower rates of

recidivism. There is prior scholarship [that] suggests ample grounds for anticipating that visitation should reduce recidivism and, by extension, that greater amounts of visitation will exert an additive effect in reducing offending” (Mears, 2012, 8). One study found that “those prisoners who were visited had significantly lower recidivism rates and lived longer in the community without re-offending than those who were not visited.

Further, as the number of visits increased, the “likelihood of recidivism significantly reduced” (Claire, 2016, 197). More specifically, the type of visitation varies the effects of recidivism rates. “Being visited by a spouse or significant other results in a 9.6 percentage point reduction in recidivism, from 47.0 percent to 37.5 percent. [That is a] more than 20 percent decrease in the base rate of recidivism relative to the matched comparison sample.” Meanwhile, visits from friends show an 8.3 percentage point reduction in recidivism (Mears, 2012, 17). The fact is, people visiting inmates are the same people that support them when they get out. “For example, ex-inmates who received family visits are more likely to report having relatives who can help them find jobs, battle addictions, and make ends meet” (Mears, 2012, 7). Visitation strengthens inmates' ties to their family members who are more likely to support them, which is why “receiving any visitation is associated with a statistically significant 4.7 percentage point reduction in the likelihood of recidivism” (Mears, 2012, 16). “Among those not visited, for example, 46 percent were reconvicted within 3 years, compared with a 40 percent reconviction rate among those who were visited. Similarly, 10 percent of inmates who were not visited recidivated for a violent offense as compared with 7 percent among inmates who were visited” (Mears, 2012, 13).

### Children Are Impacted

Incarceration impacts families in a multitude of ways. When a parent is incarcerated, the child suffers. “22% of children with parents in state prison and 16% of children with parents in federal prison were four years of age or younger. [...] Nearly 1% of U.S. children under four years of age had a parent in jail. These statistics suggest that many children experience parental incarceration while in the process of forming primary attachments” (Poehlman, 2010, 3). This is an issue that many young children are facing. The longer that parents are incarcerated, the less likely it becomes that their child will regularly visit (Poehlman, 2010). Most often, a child’s primary caregiver is their mother, so when mothers are incarcerated, the child is likely to have to move homes. “An estimated 61% of imprisoned women report living with their children immediately prior to their incarceration compared to 41% of men (Goshin, 2015, 2). Whereas when fathers are incarcerated, children are able to remain in their homes and maintain the same secure attachment with their mother. “Therefore, children of incarcerated mothers are at increased risk for disrupted attachment relationships compared to those of incarcerated fathers” (Schubert, 2016, 3).

### Child Visitation is a Complex Issue

When it comes to the benefits of parent-child in-person visitation, studies have produced mixed findings. Some studies have shown that children visiting their incarcerated parents can negatively impact both parents and children. One offers that “studies have generally found benefits of child contact for incarcerated parents (82%), whereas the literature assessing child outcomes in relation to contact has yielded somewhat mixed findings (58% found benefits)”

(Poehlman, 2010, 16). Many studies are showing that the benefits of in-person visitation on inmates do not apply when a child visits their parents. Findings report either “no significant impact upon prison behavior” (Claire, 2016, 194) or that “those who received visits from children were more likely to engage in drug and property rule-breaking behavior” (Claire, 2016, 197). Also, child “visitation exhibits the weakest relationship with recidivism. There is, for example, no evidence of a statistically significant reduction in overall recidivism” (Mears, 2012, 17) or even that “visits from children heightened the risk of recidivism for fathers” (Claire, 2016, 197). This behavior can be explained because of the fact that the unwelcoming feeling and strict rules of a prison visit can cause anxiety and discomfort in both parent and child. No parent wants to put their child into an uncomfortable situation. “Many incarcerated mothers report mixed feelings regarding visitation with their children, describing visits as “uncertain,” “bittersweet,” and “overwhelming.” The limited physical contact permitted with most in-person visitation can be acutely painful for both mothers and their children. Mothers, in particular, tend to be sensitive to children’s potential distress during visitation, thereby increasing their own feelings of guilt, embarrassment, and shame. The limited-time allowed in typical visitation can also be upsetting, with many mothers reporting that visits are too short to connect with their children on an emotional level” (Schubert, 2016, 4). One of the most significant stressors is visitation through a plexiglass barrier. “This difficulty is especially pronounced in visits with small children, leading some mothers to forgo visits entirely, as visiting without being allowed to express physical affection is too painful for mothers and children” (Schubert, 2016, 4).

### Improving Visitation

By taking the problematic aspects highlighted in child visitation studies, and addressing these issues, we can make in-person visitation more beneficial for everyone. Overall, many structural changes can be made to the visitation process, which would significantly improve the quality of visits. “Simple and safe steps can be taken to increase visitation—such as improving parking availability at prisons; making visitation rooms cleaner and more hospitable, especially for families with children; reducing the administrative paperwork required for visitation, and encouraging community residents and organizations to visit inmates or facilitate visitation suggests that policymakers and corrections officials may want to take a closer look at efforts to promote visitation. Investing in policies, programs, and practices that increase visitation holds the potential not only to reduce offending but also to increase prison order and other reentry outcomes, including increased employment, reduced homelessness, and improved family functioning” (Mears, 2012, 27). “The simple addition of color or pictures on the walls would make the space more welcoming to children. In addition to its institutional appearance, many other inmates and their visitors often occupy the visiting room at the same time, creating a noisy and potentially overwhelming scenario for children. A child seated across from his or her parent may have difficulty hearing or focusing on what their parent is saying. Typical visiting involves the child being in close proximity to other inmates, which can be frightening and anxiety-provoking, especially if the child knows that these individuals have committed crimes.” And “Providing child-friendly materials, like books, toys, or games, would give children and parents a more enjoyable and natural way to engage with one another during their visits” (Schubert, 2016, 5). Specifically, when it comes to children visiting jails and prisons, the solution to easing any possible tensions does not seem to be removing in-person visitation but

instead offering extended, more supported visits. “While lengthening visiting time doesn’t separate the visitors in time and space, it does allow for more time to get past initial reactions. Second, lengthening the time mothers and children are able to spend together may make the long, expensive travel to the prison feel more worthwhile” (Schubert, 2016, 5).

There are also a few programs spearheading the improvement of child visitation that can be replicated. “For example, the Linkages Program gives incarcerated parents the opportunity to visit with their families face to face in a friendly environment at a monthly family night. Visitation would otherwise occur through a Plexiglas barrier” (Poehlman, 2010, 17). Another program in place that mitigates the negative aspects of child visitation is extended visitation (EV). “The purpose of EV, defined by the state’s Department of Corrections (DOC), is: ‘To provide offenders participating in parenting programs additional visiting privileges in order to build and/or maintain a nurturing relationship with their own children during the extended visits.’ Extended visits occur on Saturday afternoons, lasting approximately four hours. Children are split into two age groups: younger (infants to 9 years old) and older (10 to 17 years old). One weekend per month is reserved for the older children, while the younger children are eligible to visit on the other weekends” (Schubert, 2016, 6). 100% of mothers reported that they and their children preferred EV to typical visits. The reasons for the preference centered on the following themes: physical contact, the provision of activities, the more comfortable and natural feeling of interactions, privacy from the children’s caregiver and from corrections staff, the length of visiting, and the strict rules in typical visiting and the difficulty in following those rules” (Schubert, 2016, 12). The ability to actually hold your child and express emotions during a traumatic, sad, and exciting time is so very important to both child and mother, so programs such

as Linkages and EV should be commonplace. The biggest issue now is that “no national standards or best practices currently exist to guide a response to parental incarceration in general or maternal incarceration more specifically.” “For example, in some jails, children may only see their mothers through closed-circuit television transmission, whereas others provide the ability to touch, play games, or share food. With regards to programming, correctional facilities may offer child-friendly visiting spaces and some level of intervention to help families manage feelings of distress during and after visiting, whereas others provide little in the way of support” (Goshin, 2015, 3). All mothers throughout the country should be entitled to see, touch, and play with their children in the least stressful environment possible.

## **Positionality**

Before describing my own research and methods, I will first introduce my position at Starting Over Inc and describe my positionality within the organization, so that I can preface how that may have influenced my research.

I am a CASA intern working with Starting Over Inc this semester. They assigned me to the policy reform team that would occasionally visit prisons, attend city council meetings, and canvas resource fairs to let impacted people, impacted families, and the general public know that in-person visitation is being removed. I have absolutely no experience working in policy or policy reform, so I was careful to defer any questions or clarifications that I was not comfortable answering to those more versed in the topic.

Overall, I spent my time at Starting Over Inc, acknowledging that the prison industrial complex is creating many injustices against humanity, and so I must stand against this injustice. I

tried to follow the words of Father Greg Boyle, who founded Homeboy Industries: “How do we enter into this exquisite mutuality where there is no us and them? Cause that’s the whole point. [...] And while we are combating a system that is much larger than our individual interactions, I hope that our individual interactions can ripple towards the system” (Boyle, 2019). This was a question that I asked myself all semester, and of which I tried very hard to be conscious. In this paper, I am sharing the very personal and traumatic stories of people that I have come to care for and respect. I hope that I have done them justice and represented them accurately because their stories deserve to be told.

I am a wealthy, white-passing, and non-impacted individual. I have never been, and none of my family or friends have ever been, incarcerated, which means that I am not system impacted. Almost everyone at Starting Over Inc is system impacted, and many are people of color and/or impoverished. Because of my affluence and outsider positionality, I wanted to be as helpful and present as possible, mainly because I was entering a space that cared for an issue that does not personally affect me. I wanted to offer my whole self to show that I was good-intentioned and present. I tried to demonstrate care and do good work as an ally alongside the system impacted individuals. My research approach was passive because I did not impose any of my own preconceived notions on the work I was experiencing or the individuals I interviewed. I merely observed and I asked many questions to ensure that I was not making any false assumptions.

## Methodology

I will preface my research with the methodological approaches that I utilized to acquire the data that I present in this paper. The theoretical approach that undergirds my research and analysis was critical race theory because law, power, and race have built the societal structure within which my research was executed. My research is a brilliant example of the intersections of race, law, and power. In the case of my research, I found that racial oppression intersects with power dynamics to enforce and create laws. I also analyzed and experienced the human degradation that the prison industrial complex creates. The research that I conducted was participatory action research and ethnographic research. “Participatory action research represents a stance within qualitative research methods - an epistemology that assumes knowledge is rooted in social relations and most powerful when produced collaboratively through action” (Fine, 2018, 173). I tried to allow my conversations with the community to guide the research and solutions that I have presented in this paper. I was actively involved in the community that I was researching, refrained from imposing myself, and observed all that I could to gather data for this paper. I also did ethnographic research because I was interacting with the population of people that I was studying in the participant’s real-life environment. I used many methods to conduct my research, including participatory observation, three interviews, one focus group, and one observation of a legislative meeting. I chose these because I felt that I needed to participate to accurately observe, hear individual’s stories, brainstorm and revise visitation with a group, and I had the added bonus of sitting in on a conversation between Starting Over Inc and the office of one of San Bernadino’s board of supervisors. I tried to get different perspectives on the issue of

in-person visitation. So, I interviewed a daughter (family member) of an incarcerated individual, a previously incarcerated individual who received many visits from his mom and family, and a formerly incarcerated individual who did not receive any visits while incarcerated yet still advocates for and sees the benefits of the preservation of in-person visitation.

Here are some of the researchers that I admire and whose approach aligns with and informs my own. Walidah Imarisha explains that “I created my own prison uniform; I wear it summer or winter, sun or hail” (Imarisha, 2016, 10). Careful consideration of what I wear and how I present was a constant thought on my mind as well. There is also discussion that nips at the core of why the prison industrial complex is not scrutinized by saying that “we allow ourselves to be lulled to sleep at night by the fairy tale that only bad people end up in prison. As long as we are good, we do not have to worry about what goes on behind those walls” (Imarisha, 2016, 13). This is a result of the prison industrial complex, and the ignorance of those that are not system impacted is something that I hope to change throughout the process of my research. I also admired Norma Iglesias Prieto’s work in the *Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora* because of how she presents the “significance and meaning” (Prieto, 1985) of her research topic through artfully telling the stories of ten individuals. I will use the individual stories that I collected from my interviews to illustrate the broader importance of in-person visitation. I also followed in the example set by Ijeoma Oluo in remembering to check my privilege. I tried to conduct my research with this advice from *So You Want to Talk About Race* in mind: “pause and consider how the advantages you’ve had in your life are contributing to your opinions and actions, and how the lack of disadvantages in certain areas is keeping you from fully understanding the struggles others are facing and may, in fact, be contributing to those struggles” (Oluo, 2020, 8). I

was doing research about the lives of people less privileged than myself, so I was careful to acknowledge that I cannot fully understand their struggles. With my outsider positionality as evident as it was, I was wary of my research subjects “not trusting the idea of research and the academics who do it” (Stoecker, 2013, 2). I tried to be very aware of my academic and outside standing. I was entering a community that is not my own and using that community to complete my academic assignment. So, I hope that this piece can give back to my research subjects a form of something tangible that can be presented to the legislature along with the petitions to pass AB964.

## **Coding: Thematic Analysis**

After each of the three interviews as well as my focus group, I transcribed the recording that I had taken and then coded the transcription. The main bullet points that I have charted here are my codes (emergent and preset codes). After my first two interviews, I was able to start reading them with a few preset codes:

1. Arguments against visits
2. AB964
3. Experience and benefit of visits

These codes represent the foundation of my research on this legal topic.

My third preset was not quite a code but rather a guide for myself to be on the lookout for emergent themes in order to cluster them as a code. The codes that I created are listed below with a grey background. The column on the left houses the emergent clusters that are the way in which I arrived at the main code. These are the pieces of information that I found throughout my

transcripts which eventually matriculated into a common theme. The paragraphs on the right of the table reflect my thoughts on the process of narrowing down the information into the codes that I have presented here.

Emergent Cluster Codes	Explanation
Arguments against visits	
Illegal substances, save money, far distances (geography), transportation barriers, disability barriers, criminal record barrier, easier for guards	I knew that I needed to present the counter-argument to keeping in-person visitation, so I searched it out. I also knew that most of the arguments are flimsy and demonstrate that most of the motivation to ban in-person visitation is monetary, so I wanted to use this to support my case and argue people's well being is more important than government savings and private company profit.
Hope for recidivism, prison is a business, poor people suffer, video quality is poor, video is expensive & doesn't work	
Cost	
travel, vending machine, phone calls, "visit tax," video calls expensive, facilities opt for video to make money	There is a huge cost associated with visiting a loved one. One of the main arguments for the removal of in-person visitation is cost. So, it felt right to make a note of any time that money was mentioned.
AB964	
Spirit bill, AB103, "loophole," institutionally prefer to convert video only, old plans can continue (shouldn't visitation be standardized?), inmate preference	Because my research on in-person visitation was motivated by AB964, this felt like a necessary code. I became interested in this research through my involvement in assisting Starting Over Inc with AB964 policy advocacy. I also asked a few questions directly about AB964 to Interviewee #1, who knows a great deal about it, so the majority of the information was already grouped.
"This is a direct attack on in-person visitation"	
Society Receiving	
Society's burden, lack of knowledge, creates access for families, "no brainer"	While reading through my transcripts, it seemed obvious that public opinion of this bill is going to matter a great deal. Society consists of the voters that can urge their legislatures to standardize in-person visitation, so if we engage in conversations that educate people about the benefits of
"This is going to take conversations"	

	in-person visitation, hopefully, society will indeed agree that preserving it is a “no-brainer.”
Re-entry	
“Chip on my shoulder,” overwhelming responsibilities, prison was simpler, support system is people	I did not know prior to coding that this was a theme that would emerge. After coding, however, a discussion on how formerly incarcerated people are received by and reintegrate into society seemed very necessary. Reintegration is very difficult, but those that have had visits from their families while they were incarcerated have a much lower chance of recidivism.
Accountable	
Interconnection, build a bond, mental health stability, sanity, hope, visits are motivators, updates from outside, someone to listen, support, care rehabilitation	I entered the coding process knowing that in-person visitation improves the well-being of incarcerated people because there is a lot of literature that I included in my literature review about it, but I was not sure how to code “well-being.” As I read, I realized that having updates from outside, being able to build a bond while incarcerated, and having family to listen are all motivators that created a scenario in which the incarcerated person is accountable to and cares about the ability to see their family.
“Get the prison out of me”	
“Prison don’t stop the behavior”	
“If you have a happy inmate, he won’t have any problems”	
Families experience	
Still love them, see growth, seeing age, children bond & benefit, hope, reinvest, desire to get them out	As much as in-person visitation benefits the incarcerated person, it also benefits the family members that are able to see their loved one, so I knew that I needed to include this side of the importance of visits. Interviewee #1 has never been incarcerated and is a family member, so she provided a lot of this info.
Emails & calls a lot - still wants in-person visits	
“Dehumanization” (visits right now)	
Kept apart, “storm,” punish family for crime, deserve accountability, “population control,” deputies	I did not know this would be a code when I went into this, but as I read, there were multiple instances in which violence was forced upon incarcerated people and their families. So, I wanted to highlight this and it turned into a theme of dehumanization. That is indeed what the prison industrial complex itself is doing to people.
“Corrections don’t care”	
“The state already has a monopoly on violence over our bodies”	

Visitation (Reimagined)	
Plus: families have the chance to fight, crying, hug for a long time, no tables, crayons for kids, touch throughout visit, picture taken, mural on the wall, vending machines snacks: have a meal, see if harmed, see expression	This is a very large group of codes because I could not manage to break it up. Since there is a good deal of literature supporting that in-person visitation is beneficial, I wanted to extend visitation research towards reimagining what visitation could look like. As I was reading through the transcripts, I coded both the horrible experiences and nice surprises that people have experienced during visits as “visitation.” It all seemed to blend together because one analysis could be made synthesizing things that are working and things that could vastly improve.
“There’s something about being able to hug your dad.” “To be able to speak a language that doesn’t require words at all”	
Minus: various types, special approval sometimes needed, punish family for the crime, small tables, no outdoor visits, end visits early, wait outside to visit, dehumanize visitors as they enter, no ability to explain to kids, crying (emotion), CPS doesn’t arrange visits & only foster parents, no chance to mend relationship, no agency over visiting decisions, filth kids spaces, crammed & one a time, hot	
Dilemma of child visits	

The codes presented above are the labels or main ideas for my research findings that I will present below.

## Research

### Arguments against visits

One of my interviews was an “expert” interview because she has done a great deal of her own research into the implementation of video calling and replacement of prison in-person visitation. This, coupled with the general knowledge of my other interviewees, meant that my interviewees were able to rebut most of the possible arguments that corrections have against

in-person visitation. Currently, two facilities have been flagged by my research participants. Benoit is under construction in Riverside and does not have plans for an in-person visitation room. The second facility is Beaumont, which is located in Banning in Riverside County, which does not have an in-person visitation facility. The sheriff's argument is that "by offering video calls it will create a safer environment for guards because you have less traffic of people coming in. That it limits contraband" (Interviewee #1). However, this is "statistically not true. Most of the time, the majority of time, they get caught and they get prosecuted" (Interviewee #2). Removing in-person visitation is "just making the jailer's job easier cause they don't have to bring the inmates out and escort the visitors in" (Focus Group, Participant 3). Also, corrections departments argue that people that are geographically far away from or physically unable to visit their incarcerated loved ones will benefit from video calling. One of my interview subjects said: "I live in a completely different state and he's incarcerated on the East Coast. [...] I have been arrested and charged. And so I have a record and it's misdemeanors, but in the state of where he is incarcerated, [...] they want a written letter. So, it's just kind of like an extra barrier to being able to see him. I'm not able to be on his approved list for guests because of that" (Interviewee #1).

While the addition of video-calling can indeed be beneficial for some, there is no reason to also remove in-person visitation. Also, "people that are going to have barriers to transportation often are poor. People that are disabled often are a financial need as well. And so if that's the case, then why are video calls on average \$12 and 95 cents for 30 minutes? If that's the case, that further impacts the people that are already impacted by incarceration. People that are poor" (Interviewee #1). It appears that the primary reason correction facilities are pushing for

video-only visitation is because it is lucrative. They are also selling video calling as an accessible form of visitation for those that face barriers, yet those with barriers are the least able to pay for the high price tag of a video visit. Therefore, corrections are merely cutting people off from the option of hugging their family members for no charge. When it comes to adding in-person visitation facilities, one interviewee said that “the government agencies, they're not going to want it because they've already said it's going to cost them \$100 million to put in the in-person visitation place in the Benoit Jail” (Interviewee #3). The plans for Benoit, in San Bernardino, were set in place before AB103 was passed. Now, corrections facilities and government agencies are arguing that video-calling only will be okay, and when that argument is debunked, they argue that it will be too expensive to add in-person visitation at this point. After all, these video calls prove that “everything is all a byproduct of one business” (Interviewee #2).

### Cost

While the Department of Corrections argues that restoring in-person visitation will cost them too much, people are battling the fact that, whether video calling or visiting in-person, contact with an incarcerated loved one can become quite expensive. Some must spend their time because prison facilities can be located as far away as “an 18-hour drive” (Interviewee #2). Others spend money on snacks at the vending machines in some prisons. Those who want to bring a treat to their incarcerated loved ones have no other option than buying snacks from the vending machines, which greatly overcharge visitors. “They say you're getting overcharged because that money goes towards the camera that they use in the visiting room. Or to microwave ovens. Or the upkeep of the visiting rooms. So, the overcharging of the vending machines

supposed to cover that cost” (Interviewee #2). An interesting point to note here is that corrections often argue that the upkeep of in-person visitation is too expensive because of the guards needed. So, where is the vending machine money going?

While visiting in person can mean long travel times and pricey, but optional, snacks, other forms of prison visitation can be much more expensive. One visitor “personally put[s] \$20 a month on, and that typically lasts” (Interviewee #1) in order to call her father every weekend. Video calls are even more expensive. “It cost me \$14 each time for 30 minutes” (Interviewee #1). Also, an issue with video calling is that “half the time you can't see the person very well and the connection is not that good” (Interviewee #1). One focus group participant said that he has never had a good experience with video calls. He even argued that “they should do away with the video visits and just go back to regular over the phone or the glass, cause it's way better” (Focus Group, Participant 2). If video calls replace in-person visits entirely, corrections facilities would be saving on guard expenses and profiting off of video calls.

### Society Receiving

For AB964 to be passed, it will need to be received well and supported by the public. “Unfortunately, when nobody knows, nobody's going to vote. Nobody's going to care. Then they'll just slip in. Next thing you know, you building all prisons, or you taking visiting out of prisons, under this basis of when we could've stopped it at the beginning” (Interviewee #2). It is so important to educate people about the benefits that in-person visitation provides to inmates who then re-enter society as more balanced and supported individuals. The issue is that not all “of society realizes these battles that we face when our prison system. The lack of knowledge

brings an uncaringness. [...] But society is the ones that feel the burden of these disgruntled inmates when they get out, that they're going back to these communities” (Interviewee #2). Also, once people are educated about AB964, they will realize that this bill is “talking about creating more access for families, for children, for people that have mental health needs, for people that have financial needs. I think, that this will be well-received” (Interviewee #1). In order for people to know about the benefits of in-person visitation, however, it “is going to take conversations” (Interviewee #1). This research paper was done in hopes of educating and gathering the support of more people, including legislators.

### Re-entry

If society supports bills such as AB964, there will be less of a burden placed on society itself to rehabilitate people as they get out of prison because family members are often willing to do so. As stated in the literature review above, most previous research says that findings are mixed regarding whether having visitation supports re-entry. However, all of the previously incarcerated individuals that I have spoken to mentioned how difficult and overwhelming re-entry can be. After being incarcerated for an extended period of time, it is common to see people “getting out with a chip on my shoulder, like society owes me. It's unfortunate that you have a lot of young men that are getting out with that type of attitude” (Interviewee #2). Re-entering society is also incredibly challenging, and “the system doesn't assist us in being successful when we do get out. It's created to bring us right back. So, it is very difficult to stay out” (Interviewee #2). So, having a family support system or being able to get your child back provides help and a purpose. These are systems that help to prevent recidivism, but, as

Interviewee #3 mentions, it is very difficult to reconnect with family while also keeping up with the parole, probation, and finding a place to living and work. Upon getting out with overwhelming responsibilities is not the time to reconnect with family, so it is better for the person to have had a chance to reconnect with their family while they were still incarcerated.

“Once you get out, you're hit immediately with reporting at probation or parole. Jump into the hoops they want you to do, attending this class, that class, this, that. Find a place to live, find a job. Blah, blah, blah in this amount of time. You know what I mean? Or you're in violation. So as soon as you get out, you're just immediately hit with this huge ball of stress. You get out, you want to do right. But then they have all these stipulations on what you have to do for them that is hardly even get going on what you need to do for yourself, let alone mending relationships” (Interviewee #3).

Upon exiting prison is not the ideal time to reconnect with family, yet the family is so important as a support system to prevent recidivism, so allowing in-person visits while someone is still incarcerated is so important.

### Accountable

While family support can be extremely helpful upon exiting prison, family visits also prove to be beneficial while someone is still incarcerated. Sending someone to prison does not necessarily “stop the behavior” (Interviewee #2), however, having family visit reminds inmates that there is a reason to behave and make it out of prison. Existing literature has already documented many of the positive benefits of in-person visitation that I report here. Nonetheless, not every jail has an in-person visitation room, so I continued research on the positive effects of

in-person visitation. One interviewee who did not get any visits during her incarceration period said “certainly I'd have visits from loved ones, I would have fared better in jail. May not have acted out as many times as I did” (Interviewee #3). The fact is that “interconnection is very important in the rehabilitation aspects of our lives because it allows you to see what you've given up. Like if you have any kids, when your kids come up there, you're able to see them start growing and you're seeing you're missing all that. But if you take away the visits, they're not visually able to see the growth in their children or the age in their parents, so that has a stronger impact in your motivation to rehabilitate” (Interviewee #2).

While incarcerated, visits significantly benefit people in many ways, including improved mental health, ability to hold onto their sanity, access to a listening ear, updates from outside, and providing hope. One interviewee said that if she and her father “were only reduced to video calls, it would greatly impact his mental health and his stability. He is very demonstrative as a person. He very much thrives off of personal touch and that's his love language, actually, it's a physical touch” (Interviewee #1). Another said that “it's also good for the person that's incarcerated their mental health well-being. They don't have any connection to the outside. Their mentality is guaranteed to diminish in some respect” (Interviewee #3). Finally, my third interviewee said, “for myself, I don't think I would've been able to hold onto my sanity for 31 years if I wouldn't have had that interaction with my family and loved ones” (Interviewee #2). Every person that I interviewed agreed that visits were a huge part of inmates' well-being. Additionally, one interviewee enjoyed that visits allowed him to interact with his family in a very normal way. He said that “these are family members, so regardless of the setting, you're still family. You feel comfortable to voice grievances or whatever it may be. I know they would

come up here and they would tell me all my nephews messing up” (Interviewee #2). That ability to stay connected to and be informed about one's family is so vital for providing hope to incarcerated people. At the end of the day, visits help “keep you a part of a family structure, because a lot of times you feel lost in the system” (Interviewee #2) and previously incarcerated people report that “it's important to know that you still have people out there that care about you and support you” (Interviewee #2). This support from family also provides incarcerated people with hope that they do not get from any other aspect of their lives. “Those visits provide hope because by people visiting, it shows that they still have to carry value for you. [...] They still like you after all you've done. If you're just sitting in there, thinking about the things that you've done, you don't know if anybody at all cares about you anymore after what you did” (Interviewee #3). The hope instilled is evident when “their whole demeanor, their whole – everything changes. They are excited. They're hopeful. The visits mean everything to them” (Interviewee #3).

Along with the benefits to incarcerated people, prison guards also benefit from in-person visitation because inmates are motivated to behave in order to not have their visits taken away. “Visitation is one of those things that they kind of hang-over your head when you're incarcerated, saying like... It's a motivator. It's a motivator. Like, you're not going to get this visitation, I'll take it away if you do X, Y, Z” (Interviewee #1). And visits indeed work as a form of inmate control. “The people on the inside were they made sure that they followed all the rules because they bang on that visitation over your head. If you do anything that they don't like or whatever, they'll cancel your visit. So people who have regular visits were more compliant on the inside” (Interviewee #3). The fact that people are sure to behave demonstrates how important

visits are to them. Visits are also serving as a form of control for corrections, so both sides are winning when someone receives a visit.

### Families experience

While inmates clearly benefit from prison visitation, family members do as well. The fact is that “children can't pick who their parents are, and just because their parents had made a bad decision and find themselves incarcerated, that's still their parents. They're going to still love them regardless” (Interviewee #2). This is true for so many children. “Children have less behavioral outcomes to parental incarceration when they're able to have in-person visitation. So, they show less chances of reporting behavior from their teachers, like at school. They show more connection with that parent once the parent is released” (Interviewee #1). Also, when a child sees their parent, the parent is able to explain what is happening. One interviewee who was not allowed to see her daughter after being locked up said that “when they took Adrienne. She wasn't allowed to see me. So she imagined what was happening and so she thought that I was sleeping at the courthouse inside the courtroom. Because that was the last place she saw me” (Interviewee #3). Parents should be able to talk through this sort of traumatic memory with their child.

Visits also allow family members to see the growth of their loved ones, to gather hope, to reinvest in their desire to be present when they get out and to ensure that they are okay. One interviewee said “I would be devastated if I didn't have the opportunity to be able to visit him in person. [...] It gives him some hope that we'll at the very least be able to see each other once a year” (Interviewee #1). This interviewee lives across the country from her incarcerated father and is therefore only able to see him in-person once a year, and that one visit means everything

to her. She said that she “was finally able to fully physically realize that he's not free and that was incredible. [She] think[s that] it lit that much more fire in [her] heart to fight for his freedom” (Interviewee #1). Also, the ability to see her father is “crucial because, although you're monitored, they can't monitor your eyes. [...] I know what he looks like when he is depressed when he's happy. I know what he looks like when he has something to say and he can't say it. Those are things that video calls cannot convey” (Interviewee #1). This interviewee actually communicates with her father quite a bit. “Sometimes it's two times a day that I send emails. So, it's very, very frequent. And then calls, he calls me every Sunday. So, every Sunday I get usually 30 minutes with him” (Interviewee #1). Even though she talks to and emails her father frequently, she looks forward to and most enjoys her once a year visit with him because nothing can replace the ability “to be able to speak a language that doesn't require words at all” (Interviewee #1).

While doing my literature review, it was obvious that there is an abundance of research that had already been done to show the positive effects of in-person visitation. So, the bulk of my research project here will build on the findings from existing studies by taking them as a baseline of suggestions for in-person visitation programs. I asked formerly incarcerated people and their loved ones what made visits positive and what reforms could be made. They are a valuable source of knowledge because they are directly impacted and have the kind of lived experience that is often overlooked or ignored by policymakers who have the power to decide the fates of incarcerated people.

### “Dehumanization” (Visits Right Now)

Many of my interviewees described that visits can be extremely dehumanizing to inmates and their families. One interviewee mentioned the very fact that in-person visitation is not offered everywhere is equivalent to “taking away the social fundamentals. You're already breaking down the family structure, now you're taking another element out of that equation” (Interviewee #2). Interviewee #3 felt that the removal of in-person visitation demonstrates that “they're just trying to get as many people shut off as they can. It's like population control or something. We lock them all up, I'll be right here in this spot” (Interviewee #3).

A lack of in-person visitation will also pose difficult for families with children. The literature review shows that child visitation is a complicated and stressful issue for many families. While some parents are indifferent to visits because they “wouldn't want their children to come see them there because it's the jail or whatever” (Interviewee #3), others may want the ability to, “as a parent, decide [they] want to see [their] child and take the time to explain what happened, what is happening” (Interviewee #3). When children are not able to visit their parents, some become afraid and do not understand what has happened. Interviewee #3 said that her daughter thought that she was sleeping in the courthouse because that was the last place they had seen each other.

“But if we had been afforded in-person visitations while I was incarcerated, these questions could have been addressed, these misconceptions dispelled and instead of going a year on what she's thinking. God only knows what she's thinking, right, because she really has no concept of what has happened. You know what I mean? Other than mommy's gone, in jail or whatever. So having the in-person visitation, you are able to

address issues and maybe even issues between you and the person that's coming to visit you” (Interviewee #3).

Child visitation should be an option for those parents who wish to have the ability to explain the situation to their children. However, “if the foster parent is a family member, then you may see instances like the children coming to visit their parents. But as far as CPS transporting children to the jail to see incarcerated family? No” (Interviewee #3). This is incredibly difficult because most children in foster care become another group of people that cannot visit their incarcerated loved one even when in-person visits are offered.

For the population of people that are fortunate enough to be able and allowed to visit their family members, many of them have experienced that visitation spaces are not kept up and can sometimes be in sub-par condition. Formerly incarcerated interviewees described that jail or prison becomes their home, but the people who work there do not respect the facility. One focus group participant described that “while you're incarcerated where you at, this is your house. And because they work there, they treat it like it's whatever” (Focus Group, Participant 3). This means that facilities are often not kept up. I will offer a few more examples of the lack of upkeep in visitation rooms throughout the next few paragraphs. Visiting rooms are often overcrowded. One interviewee described a glass barrier visitation room as “just a space and everybody’s crammed in. [...] There's only one seat per booth, so only one person could sit down and talk at a time” (Interviewee #3). Another described that “it was really hot in there. It was really hot. It wasn't no air or anything in there, and it's like twelve people in there like six on this side, [...] and one lady was so hot she fainted in the visiting room and it was five minutes into the visit and because she fainted, they cut her visit short so it was like, they don't care” (Focus Group,

Participant 3). This heat is an example of the conditions that are unacceptable. Other features of visitation are quite insulting to visiting families. For example, the tables that visitors and inmates sat around used to be a normal height, but “most of their tables are this high now. Yeah. They say because of security issues or people passing things under the tables. Which is uncomfortable, though. So, now you're sitting at regular-sized chairs with the tables down here. Like for me, my family's all aged over the years, so that's more difficult” (Interviewee #2). Another visitation option is outdoors. However, “most of the time they even cancel that outside part of the visiting, saying that they don't have the additional supervision that'll let you go outside. And then, sometimes it's too hot to go outside anyway because most of these prisons are in desert areas where it's like 110. Who wants to go outside in 110-degree weather?” (Interviewee #2). Even when heat is not an issue, ending visits is a trend for many jails. Typically, “once the visiting room starts getting overcrowded, that person, the first person in the visiting room, they'll come and say, ‘Well look, you got to end your visit.’ No matter where they came from, they might've traveled a long distance, but they were the first ones in the visiting room and the visiting room's getting overpacked, and they need that space. Instead of building a bigger visiting room, they rather just cancel your visit” (Interviewee #2). A lack of space in visitation rooms should not prevent families from spending time together. Visitation facilities should be expanded.

Furthermore, there are times when families show up to jail but do not get to see their loved ones at all. One interviewee described a time where he was unable to see his family because of a riot in the yard, and he had to wait a week before he was able to contact them and let them know he was okay.

“They had a mass riot on the yard, so I wasn't able to come out at all. They kept my mother in the visiting room for like hours. [...] So, here she's worried about me. I'm worried about her. I can't contact her because there ain't any movement. [...] So, it was like maybe a week later that I was able to finally get on the phone and call her and let her know what happened. [...] Things like that happened where it worries you and you feel powerless because you want to let your family know that you're okay. And then, you want to know that they're okay. But in that situation, is no communication. So, you just have to weather the storm” (Interviewee #2).

While in-person visitation facilities are not maintained, family members are treated poorly when they visit their incarcerated loved ones. The treatment they get is dehumanizing and usually, corrections officers are punishing family members for a crime that they themselves did not commit. When asked about visitation experiences, one interviewee reported, “my suggestion would be don't victimize our family members that had come to visit us. Corrections officers have a tendency to be biased towards our visitors and make them suffer for the mistakes that we've made. And so, they're very abusive towards them” (Interviewee #2). Others shared this interviewee's sentiment. In the focus group, it was evident that while there are “deputies that's pretty cool as far as they understand,” there are other “deputies that might come in there and they don't care. Your visit may, it may be time for your visiting because they own whatever they own. They may not give you your visit, they may come up with something or not give you your visit, I cut your visit short. They do all kinds of crazy stuff. Stuff you wouldn't, you could never imagine” (Focus Group, Participant 3). Another example of dehumanizing treatment is when

visitors are forced to wait outdoors for their visits. “They had an inside part where they can go in, but they wouldn't let them go in there. They would make them stand in the sun as they're waiting for the place to open. So, you have people lining up like five o'clock in the morning, and they make them stand outside instead of allowing them to come inside” (Interviewee #2). Some family members have barriers to visiting their incarcerated loved ones. One participant mentioned, “they got this hardship law. My mother is disabled, she gets a letter from her doctor. I submit it to my counselor, they're supposed to transfer me somewhere closer to make it more convenient for my family member. But they always deny them on the premise of safety and security” (Interviewee #2). He felt that they were making his mother suffer for a crime that only he committed. He said that from a correction standpoint he, “shouldn't have done the crime. [He] should've thought about that before [he] committed a crime” (Interviewee #2). Another barrier and way in which family members are punished for the crime is that those with a record are prevented from being able to visit their loved ones. Special visitation is needed for someone with a record to be able to see their incarcerated loved one just once a year. The fact is that “Corrections don't care” (Interviewee #2) and that “the state already has a monopoly on violence over our bodies” (Interviewee #1). Visitation is one of the many ways that this violence is enforced.

### Visitation (The Positives & Reimagining)

While many have had negative experiences with in-person visitation facilities, others have had attributes that they found made the experience much more positive. Regardless of the fact that families are often treated badly, in-person visitation is so important. Many of my

research participants expressed that emotions are strong during their visits. One interviewee mentioned that he was happy to be able to have the chance to argue with his family members. This may not seem like a point in favor of preserving in-person visitation, but arguing is a part of any normal family structure.

“Sometimes we get in arguments. We may not agree with everything that's said in the conversation. But it's a platform that still makes you feel human, still makes you feel like you're a part of something. [...] You call later on and you'll apologize, somebody takes a higher road, and it works out. It's not always happy and joyful” (Interviewee #2)

Another dominant symptom of the overwhelming emotions that occur during visits is crying. When visiting her father, one interviewee explained, “lots of crying. I mean, I cried so hard at the beginning of that visitation that my dad, he was holding me when he first came out and I hugged him, he was holding me. [...] And I knew I had to get it together, but it was really hard” (Interviewee #1). One mother recalled her last interaction with her daughter.

“They took her from the baby sitter. Because they took me straight to jail. So there had been no contact, right? So they brought her in, of course, I'm a little emotional. I'm not crying like, [whining]. But my eyes are welling up, because I'm just like, "What is this?" Because it's traumatic, right? So the lady looked at me and said, "Don't cry. Don't cry.” Right? So I kind of pulled it together within. [My child], obviously, can see that I was in a little bit of the stress. So then she started crying, and they ended the visit.” “It's the CPS. Because we had a court date, and so the child had to be present or whatever, and me. Yes, I had to be there obviously. So they were "being nice" and allowing us to have a visit” (Interviewee #3).

There is no black and white answer for what to expect as a response from people when they see their incarcerated loved one because people are complex and have complex feelings. We should be affording them the opportunity to express those feelings in whatever way is best for them. Touch is also very important to family members. One interviewee recalled that “the guards actually didn't do anything when I scooted my chair right next to his and put my hand on his hand, I like did it secretly” (Interviewee #1). During contact visits, family members should be allowed to hold each other for as long as they desire. This applies to hugs as well. “The biggest thing was being able to put my arms around him and hug him, and the guards there were nice enough to let me hug him for what felt like a really long time” (Interviewee #1). Families should be able to hug as many times and as long as they want. After all, “there’s something about being able to hug your dad” (Interviewee #1), and, as said from a father’s perspective, you gotta understand, when you're doing time, you're around all these dudes all day, 24/7. So you feel good to just be able to just hug your mother, or hug your girlfriend, or just hug your child, things like that” (Focus Group, Participant 3).

Another aspect of visitation at some facilities is that they have features that significantly improve visitation experience for families. One facility had a mural on the wall “and it was painted with like trees and birds and a bunch of animals” (Interviewee #1). This facility also “didn't have a table between” visitors and their loved one (Interviewee #1). It is a “very unique place in that they provide crayons and puzzles for kids. There were kids there and families sitting around together, there can be up to five of us together, at most” (Interviewee #1). This visitation facility had a great kids’ space. Others do not have kids’ areas, and some that do are filthy. One interviewee reported that they’ve seen a range of child areas and that “some of them have a little

kid space, and some of them don't. But the ones that did have kid space, they were filthy, the games were all, pieces or missing things broken, rat feces, stuff like that, have for that kind of thing” (Interviewee #3). Another interviewee said, “you may see a few roaches, you may see a rat. All that, it's normal” (Focus Group, Participant 3). Rats and filth should not be normal! Kids' areas should not only exist in all visitation rooms, but they should also be clean! Finally, a feature of visitation that sort of exists right now is the ability to have a meal with your family member in the visitation room.

“There was a room outside of the in-person visitation room with vending machines. And before they actually bring your loved one out, you have the opportunity to get as many snacks as you can possibly buy. And so we loaded up with these little, they have these little pieces of cake, and they have chips. And he loves Coke, so we got him Coke. And coffee and candies got lots of candies. Just junk food. That's all it has is junk food. [...] So, you can technically have a meal, it's junk food, but you get to break bread with the person that you love” (Interviewee #1).

A focus group participant who has also had the vending machines suggests that “you could maybe have food, like where you could order hot food or something like that” (Focus Group, Participant 2). The ability to share a meal with a loved one is a very special moment for many, and the addition of more food options, even if they are simple and microwaveable, can really improve the experience for families.

Conjugal visits are a wonderful form of in-person visitation but only a limited number of people have access to them. During “conjugal visits, [...] your family can stay for the weekend and you guys are together for the weekend” (Focus Group, Participant 2). These visits are held in

an apartment attached to the prison facility. The apartment is quite normal. “They got a TV and they got a yard where you can go play with your kids. Basketball, volleyball. It's really nice” (Focus Group, Participant 2). This is a program almost as great as those mentioned in the literature review, and it is largely present in prison facilities. However, a person needs to be married in order to even apply for conjugal visits. That means for those who have kids with a partner, they need to be married to said partner in order to be able to have a conjugal visit with their child. Also, for those who are married, they can only apply for a conjugal visit once every 90 days. Finally, conjugal visits are not offered at jail facilities and are only offered at prison facilities that are often located farther away. It would be awesome to see conjugal visits offered at every incarceration facility.

## **Conclusion**

During a visit done outside of my research for this project, I visited a man that was being held at the Adelanto detention facility. There was an immigrant rights organization who could arrange visitors for him, so he would always take them; he wanted random strangers to visit him. The visits offered him hope and brought him some form of learning about the world. I was one of those strangers, and I clearly understood how important human engagement and engagement with the outside world was in that visit with him.

Visits, in a nutshell, offer care rehabilitation to incarcerated people, their families, and eventually the society that receives ex-inmates. As one interviewee said, “having in-person visitation at the very least co-exist with video calls, and be offered at every single facility, ensures that we have the least bit of accountability that we deserve. Which is just being able to

lay eyes and hands if you can, at the very least eyes, on the person that you love” (Interviewee #1). This should also be supported by the Department of Corrections because “if it's about rehabilitation, then family is a big part of rehabilitation. The structure of our families, the structure of people that care about each other” (Interviewee #2). This structure should be supported not only by corrections but also by the California Government which will soon have the opportunity to pass AB964. We as a community should also be supporting a structure that benefits family rehabilitation and looking into how to further its benefit because it is such an excellent structure. After all, “everyone [...] in the outside world is a whole lot more than the worst thing they’ve ever done” (Boyle, 2019) and we should not stop supporting the recovery and healing of those that are incarcerated just because they did a bad thing.

Not everyone will be directly impacted by the fact that not all jail facilities have in-person visitation available, but everyone can support that they exist. So many people will directly benefit from its existence and standardization. My hope is that after reading prior research about the positive effects on in-person visitation presented here in this paper, that you have arrived at thinking that “this is one of those bills that it's kind of a no brainer” (Interviewee #1). Let’s ensure that families have access to each other.

## **Appendix**

- I wished to pursue an additional focus group but did not have the time. This focus group would consist of people who are not impacted by incarceration and do not know about AB964 and would naturally be unresponsive to prison legislation. I had hoped to get their general reactions to the removal of in-person visitation in lieu of a video call. I

would then read them a few of the benefits of in-person visitation. With this information offered to them, I wanted to see if they would support AB964 and if that response had changed from their initial response. This focus group would have informed on the general response to video calls as well as the impact of educating people about the benefits of in-person visitation. Laws are driven by people, and so if people who are unaffected by the passing of one can still get behind it, then it is likely to be a success. I would love for someone else to pursue this area of inquiry.

- Because this paper was narrowly focused on in-person visitation, I did not have the chance to talk about Starting Over Inc, which is an incredible organization that provides re-entry services to formerly incarcerated people. They do so many things to ease the difficult transition that so many people face. As listed on their website, “Starting Over, Inc’s mission is to assist low-income men, women, and children in need of housing by providing transitional or permanent supportive housing and reentry services while effectively fostering self-reliance, leadership, civic engagement, and economic development.” They provide “transitional housing and reentry services while helping to build strong communities through recovery, civic engagement, and leadership development.” Along with transitional housing, Starting Over Inc provides system impacted people with job preparation services, legal services, family reunification services, and they work for policy reform. Starting Over Inc is also partnered with the Riverside chapter of All of Us or None.
- At a recent conference hosted by the Center for Employment Opportunities, it was stated that system impacted people not only deal with the consequences of time lost in prison

but also face the collateral consequences of prison when they are out. These consequences can mean that they face up to 46,000 barriers to reentry into society. Most of these barriers are related to the basic safety that most humans are afforded. This includes housing, your family, a job, and a right to a fair trial. With a criminal record, people lose many freedoms, as they are monitored by parole officers, and are silenced because they worry that any misstep will get them back in prison. People's lives are completely torn apart in every direction when they are sent to prison/ jail. Many people have lost their kids to the foster care system when they go to prison. It is an incredibly difficult task to get them back when they are released. These insurmountable barriers account for the fact that the California's recidivism rate is 65% (Recidivism Rates, 2019). Over half of people that leave prison are not able to remain members of society.

- Starting Over Inc advocates for and provides services for this impacted community, and helps ease their transition by bridging some of the barriers that they face because they know that reentry is a huge feat to take on alone. Recidivism is high, so Starting Over Inc steps in and offers people a roof over their heads, a few job prospects, hope that they will get their kids back, legal representation, and a chance to be a part of larger systemic change to the prison industrial complex. Most of this is done through being present outside of courthouses and jails and letting impacted people know that they are here to help. These services, while so vital, hardly create equality, and definitely not equity, for impacted people.

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