

## Roberta DiMezza

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**From:** Melonie Perez <melonie@daretowin.org>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 24, 2026 3:01 PM  
**To:** House Judiciary Committee  
**Subject:** DARE Testimony in Strong Support of H 8117  
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Dear Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE) respectfully submits this testimony in strong support of House Bill 8117.

For 40 years, DARE has organized low-income families in communities across Rhode Island to fight for social, political, and economic justice. Through our work, we are in close contact with families directly impacted by incarceration—and we consistently hear about the barriers they face in simply staying connected to their loved ones.

The cost of communication is one of the most common and painful challenges.

Families are often forced to spend significant portions of their limited income just to maintain regular contact. For many, this means making impossible choices between staying connected to a loved one and meeting basic needs like food, rent, or utilities. These financial burdens fall hardest on low-income communities and communities of color.

Equally concerning is the lack of meaningful, in-person contact.

We regularly hear from families—especially parents and children—about the emotional toll of not being able to see or physically connect with one another. In-person visits are essential for maintaining relationships, supporting mental health, and preserving a sense of humanity for those who are incarcerated.

When we limit communication, we do not just isolate individuals—we destabilize families and communities.

Ensuring free communication and restoring in-person contact visits is a critical step toward supporting family unity, reducing harm, and promoting successful reentry. Strong family connections are one of the most important factors in helping individuals return home and stay home.

H 8117 recognizes that connection should not come at a cost and that dignity should not be denied.

DARE urges the Committee to pass House Bill 8117.

Please also find enclosed are letters of incarcerated individuals that have written in support of this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Melonie Perez  
Behind The Walls Committee Organizer  
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SUSTAIN OUR WORK