

Ms. Masters, I read recently that the NY Department of Corrections is investigating the discontinuation of actual mail to incarcerated persons. I am not a New York resident but I am the sibling of an incarcerated person and I'd like to share my point of view.

I feel very strongly that the delivery of actual mail can be an emotionally charged experience for someone who is on the inside. Those people get so little contact from caring persons on the outside and a handwritten note can mean so much more than a "text" letter delivered by the likes of TextBehind. While I (and my incarcerated brother) can appreciate the speed of communication with the text/scan method, it doesn't have the same opportunity to pull a heartstring for someone whose life is so encapsulated and who has so little to look forward to. I am especially concerned about losing the "touch" of handwriting - think of what it means to you to see and recognize the handwriting of someone you love. There's nothing that matches that.

And the for-profit companies that are usurping the delivery of "real mail," is another aspect that really grates on me. Most people in prison are from humble backgrounds. Often living at/below the poverty line, the loved ones of incarcerated people can ill afford the package rates for sending text letters. Why does our society continue to prey on the already trodden upon? My own family circumstances are somewhat advantaged. But as the primary contact for my incarcerated brother, I have a JPay account so I can send him money. I get charged a hefty rate for the transfer of money to his commissary account. I have a TextBehind account so I can send him letters and photos of family members and friends. I have to buy a package on the website and use points to send different types of not-really-mail. Recently, my brother and his cohorts were offered tablets. He was so excited that we could email each other. Except that it's not email like I'm using to contact you. Again, it's a separate program that requires me to subscribe for the opportunity to pay to email him through a curated website.

I believe the life of an incarcerated person is fairly bleak on a day to day basis. I believe that the contact with family/friends can be a ray of light that has a cumulative positive effect. I hope that contact with people on the outside can improve the prospects of the inmate when s/he is released. I just don't understand why "the system" makes it so hard and so expensive for outsiders to stay in touch with their incarcerated loved ones.

I hope you'll take this into consideration as you evaluate the change in mail access and distribution. "Real" mail is a touchstone to home and hope.

Mary Love Mattox