

Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security

Bill Summary

Bill Number: H2591

Name: An Act to strengthen family and community connection with incarcerated people

Sponsor(s): Representative Marjorie C. Decker

Hearing Date: 15th October, 2025 at 1PM in A2

Prior History: Favorable

Summary:

This Bill amends Chapter 127 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2020 Official Edition by replacing Section 36C with a new Section 36C which establishes comprehensive protections for incarcerated individuals' visitation rights. Correctional facilities are prohibited from limiting or reducing these rights and must allow a minimum of five visits per week, each up to four hours, including two daily visitation periods, weekend and holiday access, and flexible scheduling. The section prohibits arbitrary restrictions, such as limiting the number of unique visitors, requiring re-submission of preapproval due to private information changes, or denying visitation based on a visitor's past incarceration, volunteer work, or activism.

Exceptions are allowed only if a visitor poses a documented threat to institutional security, with written notice required. The law ensures inclusive access by eliminating barriers such as excessive background checks for long-distance visitors, improper dress code enforcement, and unnecessary use of drug-detection dogs on minors. Special provisions guarantee contact visits, physical affection with children, and confidential legal visits. People in restrictive housing maintain equal visitation rights unless actively disciplined. In the event of a family member's death or critical illness, inmates are entitled to a four-hour visit. Facilities must also accommodate restroom breaks during visits and publish notice of legal aid organizations. Preregistration, if required, must be accessible online. Video calls may supplement but not replace in-person visitation. Correctional staff must receive bi-annual training, and staff who refuse training may not oversee visitation. Facilities may not impose COVID-19 restrictions unless a visitor or inmate tests positive, nor may they cap visitation room capacity or block access due to routine drills.