



Family-Based Justice Center



Greetings from the Family-Based Justice Center!

For June, we are pleased to have Jim Chambers, a member of the FBJC advisory board, serve as guest writer for this newsletter. Last week, Jim was named “Dad Ally of the Year” by the Washington Fatherhood Council, and he will receive his award at the [2024 Fatherhood Summit](#) on June 7. In his essay below, Jim reminds us of the challenges faced by incarcerated fathers.

Honoring Fathers: A Call to Support Incarcerated Dads

June is a month dedicated to honoring fathers, a time to reflect on the vital role they play in our lives. As a formerly incarcerated father, I want to shed light on the particular struggles faced by many fathers who are behind bars. Being a dad is challenging enough without the additional barriers imposed by incarceration.

I served 23 years in prison, and I was fortunate to have the support of my mother and my children’s mothers, who ensured I had access to my kids. They did this not for me, but for the benefit of my

children. Unfortunately, this is not the case for the majority of incarcerated fathers. Many are completely cut off from their children due to the numerous obstacles and strained resources in corrections departments, limited communication access, and the high cost of staying in touch.

Visiting prisons is no easy task; they are often located far from where families live, making visits logistically and financially challenging. Even during visits, purchasing food from vending machines is expensive, and video visits, while helpful, cannot replace the physical contact necessary for bonding. These barriers make it incredibly difficult for fathers to maintain relationships with their children.

Fathers in prison also face significant barriers from caregivers and the systems that can deny them access. Some children of incarcerated fathers may also have mothers who are incarcerated themselves. As a result, these children often end up in foster care or kinship care, which can create further obstacles. Caregivers, whether family members or foster parents, sometimes deny fathers access to their children due to strained relationships.

The courts and child protective services often prioritize reunification efforts with mothers, with fathers being a secondary option. This approach overlooks the profound impact on children, who suffer from the lack of a father's presence. A father in prison or jail is no less of a father. In fact, during my incarceration, I probably spent more time having meaningful conversations with my children than do many fathers in the community.

There is a common misconception that a father who goes to prison is a bad parent. However, committing a crime does not equate to being a bad parent or loving one's children any less. According to the United States Census Bureau, over 4.3 million children experienced having a parent or guardian serve time in jail or prison at some point in their lives. That's about 6 percent—or 1 in 17—of all American children. Children of incarcerated parents are at an increased risk of adverse outcomes, and yet the systems in place continue to exacerbate these challenges. By allowing corporations to profit from communication services, such as phone calls and video visits, it becomes nearly impossible for incarcerated fathers to maintain relationships with their children.

Why aren't foster parents and caregivers trained on how to support children with incarcerated parents? Understanding the particular needs of these children is crucial to building a healthy, supportive environment. Such training should include strategies for fostering safe and loving relationships between children and their fathers.

Children need to know that their dads love them. This can happen only by ensuring that fathers have access to their children. Moreover, incarcerated fathers should be offered parenting education taught by peers with lived experience. This peer support can provide invaluable insights and help fathers develop the skills they need to be the best parents they can be, despite their circumstances.

This Father's Day, let us remember and support all fathers, including those who are incarcerated. Their love and commitment to their children deserves recognition and support, as it plays a crucial role in the well-being and future success of their children.

Happy Father's Day to all my incarcerated brothers. You can still be a dad, no matter where you are in life! Dads bring great value to your children's lives. Never stop fighting to be part of your child's life. Your child will be the one who benefits from it.

Thank you,
Jim Chambers
Recruitment and Retention Manager at Weld Seattle
Family Based Justice Center Advisory Board Member

Source: United States Census Bureau. (2023). 2022 National Survey of Children's Health. [nschdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=10215&r=1](https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/nces/nschdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=10215&r=1)

Upcoming Events

Echoes of Incarceration is inviting applications for their five-week course in filmmaking and advocacy, July 8–August 8 in New York City. The camp is open to all youth, 15–20, who have been personally impacted by the criminal justice or immigration systems. Click [here](#) for more information and to apply.

Read the Article

Although much research documents the harm that parental incarceration does to children, an emerging body also suggests that children can exhibit resilience during parental incarceration. This [2023 article](#) reviews the evidence on adverse implications for children of incarcerated parents, but also considers factors that may mitigate risk and contribute to positive youth development.

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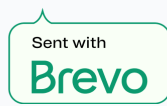
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