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Written PROPONENT testimony in favor of HB 2811, AN ACT concerning children and families; relating to incarcerated expectant mothers; directing the department of corrections to establish a correctional center nursery; requiring the secretary of corrections to establish correctional center nursery policies and procedures; relating to the Kansas family law code; amending the factors considered in determination of legal custody, residency or parenting time; relating to the revised Kansas code for care of children; amending K.S.A. 23-3203 and 38-2276 and K.S.A. 2023 Supp. 38-2202 and repealing the existing sections; also repealing K.S.A. 2023 Supp. 38-2202a.

TO: Chair Rep. Waymaster and members of the Appropriations Committee

FROM: Lucrecia Nold, Public Policy Specialist, Kansas Catholic Conference

DATE: March 13, 2024

Chair Waymaster and committee members,

My name is Lucrecia Nold, and I serve as the Policy Specialist for the Kansas Catholic Conference, representing the Catholic Bishops of Kansas. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony as a PROPONENT to bill HB 2811.

The Catholic Church supports the development of a correction center nursery for at least two primary reasons. 1) It will help facilitate care and compassion to the mother and child, and 2) recognizes the human dignity of the imprisoned, affording them the chance to bond with their newborn child and offer to them a living, breathing reason to reform their life.

Pregnant incarcerated women already face many challenges that simply come from being imprisoned. These challenges include understanding and navigating her changing body during the pregnancy and after giving birth, as well as the daunting task of finding reliable care for her infant.

Establishing a correctional center nursery can help answer many of the unnerving questions a pregnant mother may have while facing time in prison, and benefits society as a whole.

With the establishment of a nursery, incarcerated mothers will have the ability to live with, care for, and bond with her child. This is commonly recognized as crucial to the development of the child. Not only is mother-child bonding critical for child development, but it also impacts the mother. Bonding with her child, and establishing a sense of responsibility, often carries into the mother's life once released from prison. The bond between her and child, creates a sense of motivation, will, and work ethic to provide a better life for her and child once outside the prison walls.

We also recognize the human dignity this brings to the mother. Even though she is incarcerated, doesn't mean her role of mother should be neglected, ignored or be deemed of lesser value. Allowing her the ability to parent her child is an act of dignity and compassion.

In addition, the Catholic Church recognizes the importance of visiting and caring for those in prison. This comes from sacred scripture- Matthew, Chapter 25, and is considered to be a corporal works of mercy. Which is "a charitable action by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities." (CCC #2447). Taking care of incarcerated mothers and their babies are certainly a way for us to assist in their spiritual and bodily needs.

In conclusion, we fully support HB 2811. As it allows for the compassion and care of mother and child, while maintaining their human dignity.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony. Please reach out if there are any questions.



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