



## Kansas Family Voice Testimony in Support of S.B. 489

Senate Health Committee

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Chairwoman Gossage, and members of the Committee, my name is Brittany Jones. I am an attorney and the Director of Policy and Engagement for Kansas Family Voice.

At Kansas Family Voice we want to support moms and advance policies to help children thrive. We know that mothers and children need each other most in the first few years of a child's life. While not every child can stay with their biological parents, we should seek to keep parents and babies together whenever possible. That is why bills like S.B. 489 could be an important asset to our current prison system, providing some women options while they are incarcerated.

Eight states have nursery programs allowing new mothers who are incarcerated to raise their child. In Kansas, a report showed that around forty-five babies were born to women in custody over a four-year period.<sup>1</sup> Not every woman would qualify for this program but providing more options for these women could be a benefit both to the woman and her child. Without these sort of programs, children are often almost immediately placed in foster care or some sort of kinship care.

For a mother who is incarcerated, these sort of programs can help with her mental well-being and desire to plan beyond prison. While there are some conflicting reports on the impacts of such programs on children, we know bonding with a child's mother is a strong indicator of future health.<sup>2</sup>

Physically, having the opportunity to breastfeed can have lasting positive impacts on a child & mother.<sup>3</sup> Some of these benefits are improved immunity and brain development. Research indicates babies who are born in prison and can maintain a connection to their mom have less incidences of depression and anxiety.<sup>4</sup> While this is not a perfect solution, we also know that we are also looking to make a very difficult situation better.

My one suggestion is that we decrease the number of months that a woman is allowed to be part of the program. Some concerns have been expressed about a child

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<sup>1</sup> Kansas sees dozens of births by jailed women last 4 years, Associated Press, <https://apnews.com/article/7a1798c5b9ee4ed186b3ddfd7d39d7ff>

<sup>2</sup> The importance of early bonding on the long-term mental health and resilience of children Robert Winston and Rebecca Chicot, *London J Prim Care* (Abingdon). 2016; 8(1): 12–14, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5330336/>.

<sup>3</sup> Christine M. Dieterich, et. al., Breastfeeding and Health Outcomes for the Mother-Infant Dyad, *Pediatr Clin North Am*. 2013 Feb; 60(1): 31–48.

<sup>4</sup> Goshin, L.S., et. al., Preschool outcomes of children who lived as infants in a prison nursery, *The Prison Journal*, 94(2), 139-158 (2014).



being in the program once they were forming memories. I am not aware of another state that allows a woman to stay in the program for as many months as S.B. 489.

This program could prove to be a valuable option for many mothers that are incarcerated in our state and create a pathway to hope and healing! Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you!