



United Way of Kaw Valley

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February 19, 2024

Jessica Lehnherr

President & CEO, United Way of Kaw Valley

Proponent Written-Only Testimony on SB 489

Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

Chair Gossage and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the Nursey Program for Incarcerated Moms (SB 489).

United Way of Kaw Valley serves a four-county region – Shawnee, Douglas, Jackson, and Jefferson – in northeast Kansas. We work with cross-sector partners and donors to create an unbreakable network of support for a strong, healthy, and equitable community. We live into this vision through grantmaking, collaborating, and convening stakeholders around issues that are too complex for any one program, agency, or government to handle on their own. Recently, we have added a whole family lens to our work and are applying a 2-generation approach to our grantmaking and convening. This approach calls for serving both the adults and the children in a family in intentional and coordinated ways to break unhealthy patterns and cycles.

We strongly support a nursery program at the Topeka Correctional Facility as it strengthens both generations in families. The research and data behind this model demonstrate the following benefits:

- **Reduced recidivism** – the mother-child bond is nurtured and cultivated, creating a firm foundation for family stability and support for incarcerated mothers.
- **Breaking the cycle of incarceration and criminal justice involvement** – nursery programs lead to better maternal and infant health outcomes; these improved health outcomes positively affect mental health and economic stability and mobility which are leading indicators for reducing the chance of criminal justice involvement and future incarceration for adults and children. Healthier children are in school more, have better learning outcomes, and are less likely to be involved in the justice system.
- **Cost savings** – neighboring states report annual savings up to \$6 million; this savings comes from reduced recidivism for mothers and fewer children in the foster care system (because of the nurturing of the maternal-infant bond in the early weeks and months).

We have learned through our partnership with Topeka Doula Project that this work would benefit nearly 25 mothers and infants – that's 25 families set on a healthier



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trajectory, leading to better outcomes for them and for our communities. **We offer our strong support for the Nursery Program for Incarcerated Moms (SB 489).**

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support and testimony with you today. Should you have questions, please contact me at jlehnerr@uwkawvalley.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessica Lehnerr". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jessica Lehnerr
President & CEO, United Way of Kaw Valley