



Written Testimony in Support of SB 489

Tracy Russell, Executive Director, Nurture KC

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Madam Chair and Members of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee,

My name is Tracy Russell and I serve as the Executive Director of Nurture KC, an organization dedicated to reducing infant and maternal mortality in Kansas City, serving Wyandotte County. In our Healthy Start program, we serve pregnant women and children from the 14 zip codes of Kansas City with the highest rates of infant mortality. These areas reflect socio-economic distress and barriers of poverty that place great hardship on the ability of families to thrive. In addition, we also house the Promise 1000 program, a home-visiting model serving counties in Kansas and Missouri, with the goal of helping children meet developmental goals and establishing and maintaining family connection and wellness.

It is with this background that I offer enthusiastic support for SB 489, a bill that would establish a nursery in a correctional facility setting. Many states have adopted this model, including some of our neighbors, as a way to strengthen families. For babies, being able to stay with their mothers for up to 36 months allows for secure attachment and strengthening of the maternal child bond that is so important for development. Our Promise 1000 program name is derived from the first 1,000 days of life, considered the most formative and critical stage for a child's future development and wellbeing. Data indicates that children remaining with mothers in correctional facility nurseries are less likely to experience depression and anxiety.

These nurseries benefit mothers as well. Studies indicate lower rates of recidivism among incarcerated mothers who are able to keep their babies while in prison. Nurseries may also provide mothers with parenting and life skills education that will aid the family going forward.

Finally, there is a substantial societal benefit in keeping these families together. Reducing reliance on an overburdened foster care system as well as reducing recidivism increases the potential of reversing the cycle of poverty for our families in greatest need.

Let's keep some of our most vulnerable families intact by passing SB 489. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.