

Department of Correction  
Testimony of Leo C. Arnone, Commissioner

Judiciary Committee  
March 16, 2012

Raised Bill No. 5288, *An Act Concerning the Children of Incarcerated Women*

The DOC supports Raised Bill No. 5288, *An Act Concerning Children of Incarcerated Women*. This bill would require the agency to study the feasibility, cost and benefits of allowing children born to women while incarcerated at York Correctional Facility to stay with their mother at a nursery established at the facility. I envision working in partnership with the Department of Children and Families and other constituencies such as the Office of the Child Advocate and Families in Crisis in this endeavor.

Many, many years ago, incarcerated women who bore children at the facility, which was then the State Prison Farm, were allowed to keep their children for several months prior to the children being placed either for adoption or with a family member. This policy stopped sometime in the 1960s as it became more expensive and associated with liability issues. But I think the time is right to revisit the issue. Research clearly points to the importance of the mother-child emotional and psychological bonds and the fact that strong familial ties factor heavily in successful reentry into the community and lower recidivism rates.

The DOC recently conducted a survey of other correctional systems around the country to gather information about what states allow female offenders who give birth while incarcerated to keep their children at the facility, the length of time and if there were additional staff required to care for the children. Of the 24 states that responded, only seven (Indiana, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, West Virginia, Illinois and Massachusetts) allowed mothers to keep their children at the facility. Eligibility requirements ranged from having less than 18 months to discharge to no length of stay requirements. At least three states limited the number of mothers and infants to five, 10 and 20 mother/infants, respectively. Staffing patterns ranged from a volunteer pediatrician with inmates assigned as nannies to a nursery operated by correctional staff and trained inmates to the establishment of an Administrative and Child Aid position to oversee the program.

My staff and I look forward to conducting this study and reporting our recommendations to you in January of 2013.