Co-Chairs, Vice Chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

Good morning. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you about H.B. 6642, an Act Establishing a Child Nursery Facility at the Connecticut Correctional Institution at Niantic. My name is Amanda Alexander. I am a member of the Women, Incarceration, and Family Law Project at Yale Law School, which has spent the past two years researching issues of importance to parents in Connecticut prisons and their families.

The Connecticut Legislature and the Department of Correction have an enormous opportunity to stem the effects that incarceration has on families. By joining at least eight states across the country that run prison nursery programs, Connecticut can foster strong early childhood development, keep families together, and help break the inter-generational impact of a prison term. What would passing this bill mean in practice? Right now, when a woman gives birth in state custody in Connecticut—as 16 women did in 2011—the mother and newborn remain together in the hospital, but are separated soon after, usually within 48 hours. The mother returns to prison and her baby is placed with a relative or in foster care. If the infant is placed in foster care, he or she is likely to be separated permanently from his or her mother. Under federal law, states are required to file a petition to terminate parental rights if a child has been in foster care for 15 of the past 22 months—a time-frame that is shorter than the average prison sentence. If instead mothers and babies are allowed to stay together for up to 18 months, as this bill proposes, this outcome could be avoided. With a prison nursery, the mother and child are usually able to leave the prison together at the end of the mother's sentence.

States across the country are realizing more and more that putting someone in prison affects not only the person locked away, but their children and family as well. Among female state prisoners, two-thirds are mothers of minor children. Incarcerated mothers are at particularly

high risk of having their children placed in foster care, as most are primary caretakers of their children before arrest, many as single parents. Many states, including Connecticut, now recognize that it is good public policy to make sure that families remain intact, as far as possible, when a parent goes to prison. In our meetings with incarcerated mothers, DCF officials, prison officials, and service providers here in Connecticut, our team has found that they share a common goal of family reunification and keeping families intact. Studies have also shown that frequent visitation, parenting classes, and prison nursery programs translate into better outcomes for children, as well as for their parents, families, and communities. These programs help keep children out of foster care, lead to better emotional and educational outcomes for children with parents in prison, and help keep parents from ending up back in prison after their release.

My team at Yale has heard firsthand from the staff of the Children's Center and Nursery at Bedford Hills Prison in New York State about the tangible and immediate gains for the families they serve—and how these translate into long-term societal benefits. Women who participate in nursery programs show lower rates of recidivism, and their children show no adverse affects as a result of their participation. On the contrary, nurseries help ensure maternal-child bonds are established during a critical period of infant development, that children are not placed in foster care, and that a prison term does not mean permanent separation for families.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Women, Incarceration, and Family Law Project at Yale Law School, thank you to the Committee for recognizing the importance of this issue and for seizing this opportunity to improve the well-being of Connecticut families and communities.