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Judiciary Committee Public Hearing

Proposed House Bill No. 6309

Testimony of Jillian Francis

Regarding House Bill No. 6309

Good morning Co-Chairs Senator Coleman and Representative Fox and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jillian Francis and I am a resident of Durham, CT. I am currently enrolled as an undergraduate student at Southern Connecticut State University. I will graduate in May 2013 with a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work and seek to pursue a career with disenfranchised populations, particularly persons who are or have been incarcerated. I currently work with parolees from the New Haven Parole and Community Services with a re-entry program in the New Haven area. I am strongly in favor of this Act Establishing a Child Nursery at the Connecticut Correctional Institution, Niantic.

Last year, Bill Number 5288 "An Act Concerning Children of Incarcerated Women" was passed through with a joint favorable vote. Unfortunately, the bill was tabled until the Session Year 2012 expired and never passed into legislation. Therefore, the feasibility study that would have been conducted never was, even though there were numerous supporters of the bill including Leo C. Arnone, the Commissioner of the Department of Correction. I am urging legislators to take a serious look on the positive impact that creating a nursery within our women's prison would have on our state.

Numerous studies have explored infant attachment and the effects that insecure attachment has on a child's future. When a child is securely attached to a primary caregiver, they are more likely to have higher cognitive functioning, higher self-esteem, and are less likely to have psychological or behavioral impairments. Insecurely attached infants tend to grow up with more deficits including behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and psychological.

Some of the predictors of securely attached infants are a mother's ability to respond to the child's needs, a strong social support system of the caregivers, and fewer negative psychological traits. Typically, incarcerated women are lacking these traits due to the lifestyle they are currently leading. To some, it may seem like raising an infant in a prison setting would be unfair or cruel to the child, but in fact, it may be the best chance that child has at forming a secure attachment to their biological mother. Many incarcerated women come from low-income, drug addicted, and uneducated pasts. The best intervention for these mothers would be to provide an educational-based intervention that would allow infants to form a secure attachment with their birth mother and also teach mothers coping strategies that they can utilize after release from incarceration. The women who have participated in prison nursery programs in other states have recidivated at significantly lower rates than the general female population nationwide. This data shows that this policy would not only strengthen already vulnerable families, but would increase public safety measures through reduced recidivism rates.

For all these reasons, I urge you to support H.B. 6309. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and for the concern you have for women and children in the State of Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Jillian Francis