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Testimony Supporting House Bill 5569, An Act Establishing a Child Nursery Facility at the Connecticut Correctional Institution, Niantic

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Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is David McGuire. I'm the staff attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut and I offer this testimony in support of House Bill 5569, An Act Establishing a Child Nursery Facility at the Connecticut Correctional Institution, Niantic.

At the Niantic facility, the state's only prison for female offenders, inmates are taken to the local hospital to give birth and are routinely separated from their infants within 48 hours, when their babies are handed over to relatives or to foster care. Yet there are many well-documented benefits to mother and child when women who give birth in prison and who are capable of parenting are permitted to keep their infants with them. There are also benefits to society at large. The committee is to be commended for once again seeking a way to provide those benefits, when appropriate, for everyone concerned.

Allowing incarcerated mothers to provide care to their infants permits them to develop an attachment that research has clearly shown is crucial to a child's secure development. An institutional nursery can provide support and education to help a mother with her parenting skills, improving the prospects for a healthy long-term family relationship. Family stability and a strong bond with her child reduce the mother's risk of recidivism and a return to incarceration. Society benefits from strong families and even more tangibly from reduced incarceration rates.

Eight states run nursery programs that permit incarcerated mothers to keep their infants with them for up to 36 months.¹ One of the oldest, operating since the early 1900s, is at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York. The other seven programs have started in the past few decades, and many are modeled on the New York nursery. The emergence of these programs in Illinois, Indiana, Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota, Washington and West Virginia demonstrate recognition of the great importance of the bond between mother and child in early infancy. The benefit also accrues to the state. A study of the New York program showed that new mothers who participated in it reoffended at about half the rate of new mothers who did not² and a 2001 study in Nebraska found the recidivism rate for participants in the nursery program was just 27 percent of the rate for non-participants.³ The financial benefit to those states, over the long term, is obvious.

The state of Connecticut would be wise to pursue the same benefits. I urge you to pass this legislation.

¹ <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2012/rpt/2012-R-0157.htm>

² http://ncfy.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/docs/18687-Mothers_Infants_and_Imprisonment-A_National_Look.pdf

³ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2768406/>