

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H.B. 5569

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Good afternoon Chairman Coleman, Chairman Fox, Sen. Doyle, Rep. Ritter, Sen. Kissel, Rep. Rebimbas and members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am Aileen Keays, Project Manager of the Children with Incarcerated Parents Initiative (CIP Initiative) within the Institute for Municipal & Regional Policy (IMRP) at Central CT State University (CCSU). I am here to testify in support of House Bill H.B. 5569, **An Act Establishing a Child Nursery Facility at the Connecticut Correctional Institution, Niantic.**

On behalf of the multitude of individuals, families and children we have worked with since the Children with Incarcerated Parents Initiative began, I would like to first thank the CT General Assembly, and in particular the Judiciary Committee, for considering the implications of this particular policy on this vulnerable, yet often overlooked population – incarcerated mothers and their infant children.

There is considerable research that demonstrates the importance of supporting the development of secure infant-parent attachment early in a child's life. Absent such attachment, potential negative consequences result including reduced healthy development, diminished resiliency later in life, as well as social and emotional maladjustments^{i ii}. Evidence also exists demonstrating a reduction in recidivism amongst participants of prison nursery programs when compared to the rates of the general prison population^{iii iv}. The benefits of such a reduction are plentiful; with two such advantages including the transition of a resident from a person engaging in criminal activity to a non-offending member of a community resulting in reduced costs to the state in terms of exorbitant state resources spent confining an individual in a correctional facility. Although once highly questioned, the outcomes are becoming universally accepted in the practitioner and academic communities. The true challenge of establishing a prison nursery today lies in the logistics of implementation.

In response to this Committee's interest during the 2012 legislative session, a study analyzing the "feasibility costs and benefits of permitting the placement of children born to detained women at the Connecticut Correctional Institution, Niantic...at a nursery facility within such institution"^v, the Connecticut Department of Correction (DOC) performed such an analysis. On January 2, 2013, the DOC released its "Prison Nursery Feasibility Report" summarizing the outcomes of its analysis, which was submitted to this committee during the 2013 legislative session.

April 1, 2013 DOC Commissioner, Interim at the time, James Dzurenda, testified before this Judiciary Committee that DOC believed the only viable option for a mother/child program was to expand its Women and Children Halfway House, operated by Norwalk Economic Opportunities NOW, Inc. (NEON), citing that its expansion could be done in short-term and with minimal funding. However, in October of that year, DOC announced it was terminating its contract with NEON and closing its halfway house program for women and children, in existence for more than twenty years, citing a lack of contract compliance, concerns with

community safety and financial difficulties. The Connecticut Mirror quoted Commissioner Dzurenda as saying the mother residents and their children "will be placed in another facility, so that proper safety protocols are being maintained"^{vi}. In response to an inquiry made of DOC about the status of contracting with another organization to provide services similar to that of the Women and Children Halfway House, DOC responded last Friday, March 21, 2014, that staff believes a contract is "in process".

Allowing mothers who qualify for community placement to reside in the community with their child(ren) as they serve their sentence is ideal for the mother, her child(ren), DOC and the state as those services are much less costly, and potentially more effective, than through the larger institution. However, some mothers will not qualify for community placement at the time of their child's birth, and there must be an opportunity afforded for those children to develop a secure attachment to their mother during these vital months. Therefore, the IMRP's CIP Initiative is here to testify in favor of the creation of a prison nursery for those mothers not considered suitable for community supervision at the time of their child's birth. In addition, the CIP Initiative is in favor of DOC reestablishing a community-based program for mothers under the supervision of corrections and their children.

To offset the costs for establishing a prison nursery, it is recommended that a review of the funding sources of the existing nursery programs nationwide be explored. The University of Alaska Anchorage's report "Analysis of Prison Nursery Benefits and Program Strategies: Alaska Department of Corrections Opportunity for Reduction in Recidivism and Improved Bonding Between Incarcerated Mothers and Their Infants" cites several federal programs that provide funding to support the existing prison nurseries. Most programs use federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) grants, Medicaid, the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition program, and donated services^{vii}. *Security* for all of the nurseries is part of the facility's normal corrections staffing with an average of three full time positions for the nursery^{viii}. Nursery *program* staff is provided through volunteer collaborations, contract services, grants, Early Head Start, Universities, TANF grants and partnerships with local non-profits^{ix}. In fact, 5 of the 6 nurseries included in the report are funded through grants and donations^x.

With the introduction of the Affordable Care Act and other federal programs committed to supporting early childhood development, as well as state programs and funds, a timely opportunity has been created. New, additional sources of federal and state funding may now be present that could support the implementation and continued operation of a prison nursery that would be outside of Correction's budget. It seems an ideal time to take advantage of this timely opportunity to examine the ability to build off of existing and newly established programming to implement and manage a nursery at Niantic.

Again, I would like to thank the Judiciary Committee for its commitment to reviewing the possibility of establishing a nursery as well as the DOC for pursuing the extensive analysis on the feasibility of establishing a prison nursery and doing so in the diligent manner reflected in their report. The IMRP's CIP initiative is at the ready to assist the legislative and executive branches as they endeavor to move forward with this project.

¹ Connecticut Department of Correction. (2013). Prison Nursery Feasibility Report. Retrieved from <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2013/JUDdata/Tmy/2013HB-06642-R000401-Amanda%20Alexander%20-%20202-TMY.PDF>.

ⁱⁱ Diamond Research Consulting. (n.d.). Prison Nursery Programs: Literature Review and Fact Sheet for CT. Retrieved from <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2013/JUDdata/Tmy/2013HB-06642-R000401-Sarah%20Diamond%20-%20Director,%20Diamond%20Research%20Consulting-TMY.PDF>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Connecticut Department of Correction. (2013). Prison Nursery Feasibility Report. Retrieved from <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2013/JUDdata/Tmy/2013HB-06642-R000401-Amanda%20Alexander%20-%20202-TMY.PDF>.

^{iv} Diamond Research Consulting. (n.d.). Prison Nursery Programs: Literature Review and Fact Sheet for CT. Retrieved from <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2013/JUDdata/Tmy/2013HB-06642-R000401-Sarah%20Diamond%20-%20Director,%20Diamond%20Research%20Consulting-TMY.PDF>.

^v Connecticut Department of Correction. (2013). Prison Nursery Feasibility Report. Retrieved from <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2013/JUDdata/Tmy/2013HB-06642-R000401-Amanda%20Alexander%20-%20202-TMY.PDF>.

^{vi} Merritt, G. (2013, October 11). Concerned about community safety, state closes three halfway houses. *The CT Mirror*. Retrieved from <http://ctmirror.org/concerned-about-community-safety-state-closes-three-halfway-houses/>.

^{vii} Marshall, L.D. (2011, April 15). Analysis of Prison Nursery Benefits and Program Strategies: Alaska Department of Corrections Opportunity for Reduction in Recidivism and Improved Bonding Between Incarcerated Mothers and Their Infants. University of Alaska Anchorage College of Business and Public Policy. Retrieved from <http://www.mpaalaska.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Marshall-Capstone-.pdf>.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Ibid.

^x Ibid.

