

Testimony Colleen Sullivan, MSW Candidate
In Support of
H.B. No. 5569, An Act Establishing A Child Nursery Facility At The Connecticut Correctional
Institution, Niantic
March 24, 2014

Good afternoon Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Colleen Sullivan and I am a MSW candidate at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill Number 5569, An Act Establishing A Child Nursery Facility At The Connecticut Correctional Institution in Niantic.

The number of women in prison has skyrocketed over the past three decades. Many of these women who enter the prison system are pregnant or parenting. There is a great need for our current correctional institution to develop with these increasing numbers and provide the right services to mothers.

The mothers who will be able to participate in this program would have committed low-level non-violent offenses, face relatively short sentences and will continue as their child's primary caregiver upon release. It is in the best interest of the child and the mother for a program to be created to allow mothers to have access to their child. These mothers will also benefit from access to trained professionals who will help in educating parents about effective parenting skills and developmental milestones. Access to trained professionals who can help the mothers acquire life skills to survive outside of prison with their children and acquire suitable housing, jobs, and child care will also be useful.

Research shows that prison nursery programs benefits the mother:

- **Lower rates of recidivism**
- Stable mental health
- Establishes a bond with their child

Research shows that prison nursery programs benefits the Infant:

- **Avoids foster care placement**
- Allows for formation of maternal/child bond during a critical period in infant development
- Develops a secure attachment

Nine states have existing or soon-to-open prison nursery programs. Some of these states include New York, Massachusetts, Indiana, West Virginia, and Illinois. These states indicated that the initial cost to develop a program was around a million dollars. They also indicated that the benefits out weigh the initial cost because participating mother stayed out of prison and started establishing more successful family structures. As community providers we know if families are provided a nurturing environment the rate of recidivism and DCF involvement decrease. Involvement with other systems is also avoided, saving our state much more then the program would cost.

Further studies have shown that there are only positive outcomes in allowing infants born in a correctional facility to stay with their incarcerated mother.

Let Connecticut be the next state in establishing a prison nursing program to benefit our children and mothers.

Thank you for your time and I will be happy to answer any questions.