



**Testimony of Louis Reed on Behalf of
Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice
In Support of Senate Bill No. 13
Before the Judiciary Committee
March 21, 2018**

Senator Doyle, Senator Kissel, Representative Tong and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for allowing me to present testimony to you today. My name is Louis Reed. I am the Connecticut Policy Director for the Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice.

Katal Center was founded in 2016 and works in New York and Connecticut to strengthen the people, policies, institutions, and movements that advance health, equity, and justice for everyone. Our work is focused on three main goals: ending mass incarceration; advancing health, equity, and justice in public safety and drug control; and building leadership and organizing capacity among local leaders, advocates, and community groups to effectively work for social change. Our municipal-focused campaign work drives state-based reform. Additionally, we provide training and technical assistance to partners around the country and world.

I am here to testify in support of S.B.13, An Act Concerning Fair Treatment of Incarcerated Women. The United States has a long standing culture of “punishment” rather than “rehabilitation” in our criminal justice system, which has resulted in us having the highest rate of incarceration in the world. This rate is higher than countries that do not offer its citizens civil rights, such as China, and 5 - 10 times higher than countries like Great Britain, Canada and France. We have 5% of the world’s population, but 25% of the world’s incarcerated. Additionally, the institutionalized racism in the United States has led the incarcerated population to be composed primarily of people of color. Many of these persons convicted - 95% of whom have entered into plea bargains - are held in conditions that threaten and/or exacerbate their health and safety. These issues often produce significant mental and physical health needs that go unaddressed, leading to needless suffering and sometimes death.

This is glaringly true for women -- women who are mothers, daughters, and/or sisters. The number of women incarcerated has grown dramatically in the past two decades, largely due to the War on Drugs. There are now more than 200,000 women in prison and more than one million on probation and parole nationwide.¹ In Connecticut, York Correctional Facility, Connecticut's only female prison, currently houses 936 women. Many of these women struggle with substance abuse, mental illness, and histories of physical and sexual abuse. 86% of incarcerated women report experiencing sexual violence in their lifetimes, about four times the rate of women outside the prison system. Few get the adequate services they need. The toll on these women and their families is devastating. We frequently think of Connecticut as having progressive policies, but women incarcerated in Connecticut are:

- Not protected by law from being shackled during childbirth
- Denied adequate access to feminine hygiene products forcing them to either purchase from the commissary or go without proper hygiene supplies.
- Not protected by laws ensuring visitation rights with their children
- Not protected by laws that protect their privacy when showering or performing bodily functions where their bodies will be exposed to staff of the opposite sex.

Connecticut Senate Bill 13 seeks to address these issues by:

- Ending the practice of using restraints on pregnant, birthing, and post-partum women
- Ensuring officers present at childbirth are female
- Establishing family centered visiting policies
- Providing lactating women a place to pump and store breast milk
- Providing feminine hygiene products free of charge
- Provides pregnant women with maternity resources like education on prenatal nutrition, high-risk pregnancies, and addiction and substance use during pregnancy and at childbirth
- Ensures that all women have the right to privacy when showering, performing bodily functions and changing clothes without non-medical staff of the opposite sex viewing their bodies.

We urge members of the Judiciary Committee to vote yes on Senate Bill 13 in order to provide fair and humane treatment of women in the Connecticut Judicial System.

¹ <https://www.aclu.org/issues/prisoners-rights>