



Wednesday, March 13, 2024, 9:00 AM
House Committee on Appropriations
Rep. Troy Waymaster, Chair
Opponent Testimony, Written
HB 2811 – Establishing a Prison Nursery

Chair Waymaster and Members of the Committee,

I come before you today to voice my strong opposition to HB2811, as it represents a misguided and costly approach to keeping mothers and babies together. This bill, proposing the construction of a 2.7 million dollar prison nursery facility for incarcerated mothers and their infants, overlooks more effective and humane solutions that prioritize community-based support and rehabilitation. **The mothers and babies who would use the prison nursery would all be low-risk offenders who would thrive with community-based solutions such as community corrections.** Keeping them in an institutional setting keeps them dependent on the government for support, perpetuates cycles of poverty, and unnecessarily wastes taxpayer dollars that would be better spent elsewhere.

Additionally, this prison nursery scheme fails to consider that pregnant and parenting mothers really need their *own mothers, aunts, and other family members* during this crucial life stage. Keeping these mothers in prison with their infants deprives both mother and child of the benefits of having close daily contact with grandmothers, aunts, siblings, and others who would typically be around to help with the many emotional, financial, and physical needs that arise in the first few years of a baby's life. When we keep mothers imprisoned within a prison nursery with their infants rather than allowing them to serve their sentences within community-based programs, they and their babies are deprived of the village of support that they'd normally have while in the community.

Moreover, mothers working in prison earn only a fraction of what they'd earn in a minimum wage job in the community. Keeping them incarcerated hurts their short term and long term earning potential, which directly hurts their infant and any other children who they are responsible for supporting. Instead of perpetuating this cycle of poverty, we should focus on empowering these mothers by providing opportunities for employment and education in the community, which would enable them to better provide for their families and rely less on charity and government programs.

Finally, a more effective solution would be to **amend existing Kansas statute 22-3730 to increase early release for parenting from 12 months to 36 months.** This would allow mothers and children to remain together while ensuring public safety and saving millions of taxpayer dollars. By keeping families intact and providing support for parenting, we can promote positive outcomes for both mothers and children while addressing the overcrowding crisis in our prisons.

In conclusion, HB2811 represents a costly and ineffective approach to addressing the needs of incarcerated mothers and their babies. Instead of building new facilities, we should invest in community-based solutions that prioritize rehabilitation, family reunification, and economic empowerment. I urge you to reject HB2811 and pursue more humane and cost-effective alternatives that prioritize the well-being of families and the public good.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

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Tuesday, March 12, 2024, 9:00 AM
House Committee on Federal and State Affairs
Rep. Will Carpenter, Chair
Opponent Testimony, Written
HB 2809 – Creating the every mom matters act

Chair Carpenter and Members of the Committee,

I'm reaching out today to express my strong opposition to HB2809, as it poses a significant threat to public health and the well-being of individuals and families across our state. This bill, which seeks to funnel public funds into programs and organizations that do not provide comprehensive evidence-based information on birth control options, undermines the fundamental principles of public health and risks harming vulnerable populations.

One of the most concerning aspects of HB2809 is its diversion of public funds to organizations that do not offer comprehensive, evidence-based information on birth control. Access to accurate and unbiased information about contraception is essential for individuals and families to make informed decisions about their reproductive health. By funneling public funds into organizations that may withhold or provide inaccurate information about birth control, this bill jeopardizes the health and well-being of our communities.

Furthermore, providing comprehensive information on birth control options is not only a matter of individual choice but also essential to the public good. Families who plan and prepare for pregnancy are more likely to have better health outcomes for both parents and children. By ensuring access to accurate information about birth control, we can empower individuals and families to make informed decisions about their reproductive health, leading to healthier families and communities overall.

Moreover, diverting public funds to anti-abortion organizations as proposed in HB2809 poses a serious risk of coercion for clients seeking reproductive healthcare services. Individuals who seek assistance from these organizations may be subjected to biased counseling or pressure to make decisions that do not align with their own values and preferences. This coercion undermines individuals' autonomy and may lead to decisions that are not in their best interest.

In addition, it's crucial to highlight that public funds should be focused on ending Kansas' racial disparities in maternal and infant health. Racial disparities persist in maternal and infant health outcomes, with Black and Indigenous individuals experiencing higher rates of maternal mortality and infant mortality compared to white individuals. *Allocating resources towards addressing these disparities should be a priority, rather than diverting funds to organizations that do not prioritize evidence-based reproductive healthcare services.*

In conclusion, HB2809 represents a dangerous departure from evidence-based public health practices and threatens the well-being of individuals and families in our state. Providing comprehensive information on birth control options is essential to promoting public health and ensuring individuals' reproductive rights. I urge you to oppose this bill and instead support policies that prioritize evidence-based reproductive healthcare services and empower individuals to make informed decisions about their reproductive health, while also addressing racial disparities in maternal and infant health.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

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