

HB 2811: Nursery Program for Incarcerated Moms

My name is Dave Ranney, I was a once-a-week volunteer at Topeka Correctional Facility for 14 years before COVID shut everything down. I've been a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate for children in foster care) volunteer in Lawrence since 2015.

I am familiar with the connections between incarceration and foster care.

I am writing in support of HB 2811. Here's why:

- *Q: When an abused/neglected child runs away from their foster-home placement, where is the first place social workers go to look for them?*

A: Wherever their mother is.

Granted, this may not apply to newborns or incarcerated mothers, but it certainly underscores the significance of mother-child relationships. They are special and lifelong. Whenever possible, these relationships should be 'built upon' rather than ignored or subjected to a rigid timelines.

- During the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee's hearing on SB 489 (identical to HB 2811) last month, a member doubted the benefits of allowing an incarcerated woman to keep her newborn child...only for her to give up the child after three years.

Please be aware that under the provisions in HB 2811, the nursery's services would be limited to mothers whose sentences, after giving birth, would not exceed 36 months. Those with longer sentences would not be eligible for the program.

- By its very nature, a correctional facility may seem unsafe for children. However, I can assure you that the inmate population will consider the program to be sacred and not to be messed with. It will be safe.
And it will not resemble a jail. I'm guessing the nursery would be a lot like TCF's Women's Activity Learning Center (WALC), which if you haven't visited, you should.

- Dani Essman, who oversees the WALC program, is a saint. She may not be well-known in legislative circles, but she is one of the state's most devoted, hands-on child advocates. No one is more aware of the life-altering traumas caused by children being separated from their mothers (and vice versa).

Ms. Essman supports HB 2811. I encourage your support as well.

Sincerely,

Dave Ranney

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