



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

HB454 Correctional Services- Pregnancy and Postpartum Support (Prevention of Forced Infant Separation Act)

Position: Support

By: Nancy Soreng, President

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The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization that works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. The League believes that early intervention and prevention measures are effective in helping children reach their full potential. The League supports alternatives to incarceration, including the transfer of pregnant and postpartum people to prerelease units.

The number of women in state and federal prisons grew by nearly 800% between 1978 and 2016. Three-quarters of incarcerated women are of childbearing age. A study that analyzed data from 13 states found a nearly 4% pregnancy rate among women newly admitted to prison in 2016. With this rise, correctional facilities have faced new challenges meeting the health care needs of women, especially those who are pregnant.

Research shows that detrimental effects can occur on maternal-infant attachment when mothers and infants are separated at birth. The majority of women who give birth while incarcerated will be separated from their newborns soon after delivery, which imposes significant limitations on breastfeeding, bonding, and parental rights. Furthermore, there are negative implications on child well-being. Research has linked parental incarceration to childhood health problems.

In 2021, Minnesota passed and the governor signed the Healthy Start Act into law. The Minnesota Commission of Corrections can place incarcerated pregnant and postpartum women in alternative locations during their pregnancy and up to one year post-birth. The benefits include increased mother-infant bonding, improved parenting, enhanced child well-being, reduced recidivism, and more.

HB454 requires the Maryland Division of Correction to allow pregnant women and those who have recently given birth to transfer to the prerelease unit to receive pregnancy and postpartum support and establish healthy bonding between mothers and children.

The League urges a favorable report for HB454.