

March 13, 2024

Ms. Amy N Pinger, CVA
Volunteer, Ministry to Incarcerated Families sponsored by United Women in Faith
Proponent Verbal Testimony on HB 2811
House Committee on Appropriations

Chair Waymaster and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the Nursery Program for Incarcerated Moms (HB 2811). Since 2014, I have served as a volunteer to the Ministry for Incarcerated Families sponsored by the United Women in Faith. United Women in Faith has partnered for more than 30 years with the Topeka Correctional Facility through the Women's Activity and Learning Center providing support for self-help groups, family friendly visitation areas, opportunities to increase mother-child bonding, educational classes, and family retreats.

One of the ways I serve it is to facilitate a 6-week evidence-based parenting class. Active Parenting is a comprehensive parenting program helping parents of kids ages 5 to 12 raise responsible, cooperative children who can resist negative peer pressure and thrive. Over the last ten years, I have led approximately 25 sessions educating 300 women on the Central (minimum & medium) and I/J (maximum) custody sides of the facility. Once residents complete the class, they earn the privilege of attending retreats with their children, where they put the skills learned in class into action.

Over the past forty years, the number of incarcerated females has risen dramatically, at a rate fifty percent higher than that of men. Women face a plethora of healthcare issues when locked up and one of the most concerning is reproductive health, specifically pregnancy and birth in prison. Roughly one in twenty-five women entering prison is pregnant. The number of babies born behind bars has grown at an alarming rate. Many of these babies are sent twenty-four hours after birth to be placed either with a family member, or more often, in the foster care system. Rather than ignoring the issue, Kansas had the opportunity to do something about it.

There are currently 9 states with prison nurseries across the United States, the oldest is located at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility for Women, a maximum-security women's prison in New York, which opened in 1901. Our neighboring state, Nebraska has had a nursery in its prison since 1994. Recently, the state of Missouri passed a similar law requiring the Department of Corrections to open a nursery in July 2025.

There have been multiple studies of the effectiveness of prison nurseries that have led to an increase in public and government support. Evidence exists that improved mother-child attachment can reduce misconduct while in prison and recidivism long-term.

It is important for infants to develop a stable secure attachment early in life. Secure attachment for incarcerated mothers and children leads to better mental health outcomes for both and

better longer term developmental outcomes (including reduced criminal justice involvement) for children. Once released, the mothers participating in prison nursery programs are more likely to regain custody of their child(ren) and to maintain and continue to grow their relationship with their child(ren) due to having formed a stronger attachment with them and having developed better parenting skills.

In closing, I believe that the Topeka Correctional Facility has the foundation & support needed to implement a successful prison nursery program that has the potential to change the lives of women and children across Kansas.

I humbly ask for your consideration of the Nursery Program for Incarcerated Moms (HB 2811) and thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony with you today. Feel free to contact me with any questions at amypinger@gmail.com

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amy Pinger".

Ms. Amy N Pinger, CVA
Volunteer, Ministry to Incarcerated Families
United Women in Faith