

March 13, 2024

House Committee on Appropriations
State Capitol
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka, KS 66612

Health Forward Foundation support for House Bill 2811 – establishing a correctional center nursery and allowing mothers to bond with their child while incarcerated.

Chairman Waymaster and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Health Forward Foundation (Health Forward), I submit this letter of testimony in support of House Bill 2811. Health Forward works to support and build inclusive, powerful, and healthy communities characterized by racial equity and economically just systems. We support this legislation as it will improve maternal and early childhood health outcomes, as well as beneficial impacts on recidivism. Many states, including Ohio, Indiana, and Nebraska, already operate successful programs like this.

A correctional nursery would improve health outcomes of both mothers and children. According to the *Prison Journal*, mothers who were able to participate in a prison nursery program reported a reduction in postpartum depression and improved mothering. Additionally, children who bonded with their mother in a prison nursery had better resilience and less anxiety than those who were unable to.

A *Public Health Nursing* study also finds lower rates of recidivism among women of color who were released from prison after co-residing with to their infant, with more than 86% remaining in their community and with their families, contributing to their economic stability. These results are likely to compound, as the number of people identifying as women who are incarcerated in Kansas is growing – climbing by 644% from 1980 to 2017. HB 2811 would also lead to improved health outcomes and access to affordable health care for children, as children born to incarcerated mothers would be enrolled in the Kansas CHIP program.

Health Forward asks this committee to vote yes on HB 2811. This legislation will improve health outcomes for mothers and children in Kansas. Feel free to reach out to me at nmadden@healthforward.org if you have any questions or requests for additional information.

Respectfully,

Nathan J. Madden, Ph.D.
Impact Strategist – Policy, Health Forward Foundation



**OUR
PURPOSE**

Every day we work to support and build inclusive, powerful, and healthy communities characterized by racial equity and economically just systems.