

Amy Nash-Kille, PhD

Portland, OR 97239 | 503-926-4919 | amynashkille@gmail.com

February 13, 2019

The Honorable Jennifer Williamson, Chair
The Honorable Chris Gorsek, Vice-Chair
The Honorable Sherrie Springer, Vice-Chair
House Judiciary Committee Members

Dear Chair Williamson and Members:

I am writing to you today in support of HB 2631. I am an advisory board member for the Women's Justice Project at the Oregon Justice Resource Center, and in my professional life I am responsible for helping to monitor the developmental well-being of over 185,000 young children nationwide. I lead the Research and Evaluation team at KinderCare Education, the largest provider of early childhood education in the United States, headquartered right here in Oregon. Before coming to KinderCare, my doctoral work focused on the study of neurological development in infants and children with special needs. Throughout my research career, I have found that outcomes for children have improved as support for parents increases.

Approximately 1 in 28 children in the United States has a parent who is incarcerated¹. Recent estimates² indicate that women are the fastest-growing population of inmates nationwide, increasing 14-fold (from under 8,000 to nearly 110,000) between 1970 and 2014, and 80% of incarcerated women are mothers. Most of these incarcerated mothers are single mothers and the primary caregiver to their young children. In addition, the vast majority of incarcerated women nationwide are in jail for non-violent offenses: 32% for property offenses, 29% for drug offenses, and 21% for public order offenses. The Oregon Justice Resource Center reports that in Oregon, incarceration of women has nearly tripled since 1995.

¹ From the Pew Charitable Trust Report on Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility, 2010, available at: https://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2010/collateralcosts1.pdf.pdf

² From the Vera Institute of Justice Report, 2016; summary: https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/overlooked-women-and-jails-report/legacy_downloads/overlooked-women-and-jails-fact-sheet.pdf full version available at: https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/overlooked-women-and-jails-report/legacy_downloads/overlooked-women-and-jails-report-updated.pdf

The incarceration of these mothers has a significant impact on their children. Children with incarcerated parents show behaviors that reflect experiencing trauma and stress, and these children are at much greater risk of experiencing economic and residential instability³. Since most children of incarcerated mothers resided with their mothers prior to becoming justice-involved, the disruption to their lives as a result tends to be greater than when a father is incarcerated.


One of the primary ways to help children of incarcerated parents is to create stability for the family overall. Policies that reduce trauma and uncertainty for children with an incarcerated mother would benefit all children, regardless of the relationship that a child has with their parent.

The legal supports that would be provided through HB 2631 offer stability to families in ways that cannot be attained through other interventions. Legal assistance to resolve child custody and visitation agreements benefits children and their parents by creating predictability and routine, and forms a basis for the creation and maintenance of positive and healthy parent-child relationships. To reduce economic and residential instability for their children, mothers need legal support to procure the correct documentation and preparation to be eligible for employment, to mitigate the impact of prior economic debts or bankruptcy proceedings, and to smooth the path towards a successful reintegration with the workforce and society as a whole.

Research on community health care workers shows that costs for high-risk patients are significantly lowered in the 180 days after discharge when patient navigators are provided⁴. I expect that a similar cost-savings effect may be achieved in providing legal navigators to high-risk families post-incarceration. I wholeheartedly recommend the passage of HB 2631 to support this important work.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy A Nash-Kille". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Amy Nash-Kille

³ National Council on Family Relations Policy Brief, January 2018, available at: https://www.ncfr.org/sites/default/files/2018-01/How%20Parental%20Incarceration%20Harms%20Children%20NCFR%20Policy_Full%20Brief_Jan.%202018_0.pdf

⁴ Galbraith et al., 2017. Long-term impact of a post-discharge community health worker intervention on health care costs in a safety-net system. Health Services Research, Vol 52(6).