



Oregon moms and caregivers fighting for gender, economic, and racial justice.

To: House Committee on Judiciary
From: Family Forward Oregon
Date: February 23, 2023
RE: In Support of HB 2535

Chair Kropf, Vice-Chairs Andersen and Wallan, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 2535. Family Forward Oregon is committed to advancing policies that support mothers, women, and families to succeed, in the workplace, at home, and beyond. We work to ensure that Oregon is a place where all families can be economically secure and have the time they need to take care of each other. Our organization strongly supports HB 2535, which establishes a new doula program at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility for pregnant individuals in custody.

As an organization that supports women, mothers, and caregivers of all backgrounds, we believe that HB 2535 is necessary to ensure the health and well-being of all pregnant women and pregnant individuals in custody. The doula program established in HB 2535 as it will be amended, will:

- Provide incarcerated women access to trained professionals who can assist with physical, emotional, or informational support to a pregnant woman before, during, and after delivery.
- Require the Department Of Corrections to make reasonable accommodations for doula services and to partner with trained community professionals to provide doula services.
- Prohibit a person in custody from being restrained during transport, labor, birth or the postpartum period at the hospital unless reasonably necessary for legitimate safety and security needs.
- Require development of a process for documentation on the use of restraints recommendations for improving procedures that incorporate feedback from listening sessions.

Women, in particular, are entering the criminal justice system in increasing numbers due to the effects of poverty, trauma, unsafe housing, abuse, low levels of economic capital, discrimination and institutional racism. According to an article by the Statesman Journal, the number of women imprisoned in Oregon has nearly tripled over the past 20 years, even though women are not committing more frequent or more serious crimes¹.

¹<https://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/crime/2017/02/16/oregon-faces-skyrocketing-female-prison-population/98012786/>

Moreover, the U.S Department of Justice estimates that nationally 5-10% of the over 200,000 current female inmates are pregnant at the time of admission. And upwards of 25% of all incarcerated women are pregnant or have given birth in the past year. In a first-ever systematic study of pregnancy outcomes in carceral institutions in the U.S by Advocacy and Research on Reproductive Wellness of Incarcerated People, (ARRWIP), data showed that miscarriage, premature birth, and cesarean section rates in state prisons were higher than national rates among the general population².

The lack of gender responsive and trauma-informed practices in correctional facilities is perpetuating cycles of abuse, trauma, victimization and harm among incarcerated women. Gender responsive interventions in prisons, such as a doula prison program, have been proven to achieve decarceration, improved safety and more positive outcomes for women³. Research has shown that doula support for women in custody also improves both birth outcomes and breastfeeding.

Family Forward believes that if we want to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma among families impacted by the carceral system in Oregon, we must start by appropriately addressing the unique needs of women, parents, and caregivers who are currently incarcerated. The doula prison program in HB 2535 is a critical step towards that vision.

We urge your support of House Bill 2535.

Lisa Kwon
Policy Manager
Family Forward Oregon

² <https://arrwip.org/projects/pregnancy-in-prison-statistics-pips-project/>

³ <https://womensjustice.net/the-facts>

