

## PROPONENT SB489 - WRITTEN TESTIMONY

February 19, 2024

Chair Gossage, Vice Chair Erickson, Ranking Member Pettey and Committee Members:

I am Dr. Dena Hubbard, Public Policy Chair for the Kansas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (KAAP) and a board-certified neonatologist. Thank you for the opportunity to convey KAAP's support for SB489. Representing 450 pediatricians and pediatric residents, we are committed to the goal that all children grow safe and strong.

This proposed legislation will establish a correctional center nursery within the Department of Corrections to provide support for expectant mothers and their children during incarceration. Specifically, the bill permits certain expectant mothers to nurture and form bonds with their children for up to 36 months while in custody, recognizing the pivotal role of mother-child bonding in shaping positive outcomes for both mothers and infants. The nursery environment facilitates the establishment of strong emotional connections between infants born during incarceration and their mothers, serving as a foundation for the child's future physical and mental health, resilience, and social competence.

Although raising young children behind bars may not be ideal, prison nurseries play a crucial role in fostering psychological attachments between mothers and their children. These formative years are recognized as a critical period for the development of social and emotional competence. The bond between mother and child significantly influences brain development. Responsive and attuned interactions with mothers help infants and toddlers regulate emotions, learn social cues, and establish the foundation for healthy relationships. Research underscores the importance of this early bond in contributing to long-term happiness. Additionally, mother-child bonding supports cognitive development, as positive interactions stimulate neural pathways critical for exploration and learning.

Prison nurseries provide a supportive and nurturing environment for both mothers and children. In addition to parenting classes, mothers have access to medical care, early child learning programs, and facilities for meal preparation. Participation in pre-and-postnatal programs, covering child development, parenting and family skills, and self-esteem and self-care, is often mandatory once enrolled in the program.

Studies indicate that maintaining family bonds through prison nurseries contributes to lower rates of recidivism. The opportunity for mothers to care for their children has demonstrated positive life changes, reducing the likelihood of returning to criminal behavior. States with established prison nursery programs report significant reductions in reoffending rates, underlining the long-term cost-effectiveness of such initiatives. Ultimately, the investment in establishing a prison nursery is perceived as minimal compared to the potential benefits, with expected expenses offset within a few years due to sharp declines in recidivism.

Please join us in supporting all Kansas mothers and children, even our most vulnerable who are born during incarceration. For all the reasons noted above, we strongly support SB489 and urge you to vote yes.

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