



**Senate Bill 2352
House Judiciary
March 11, 2025
Representative Klemin, Chair**

Chairman Klemin and Members of the House Judiciary Committee, my name is Missi Baranko and I am the Executive Director of USpireND, a nonprofit organization in North Dakota that serves children, families and child care providers.

I am testifying in support of SB2352. One of our main programs, Healthy Families ND, has been working with parents for over 25 years. In 2019, we also began offering Healthy Families home visiting services to incarcerated pregnant women. We knew incarcerated mothers often faced significant stress and health challenges and the Healthy Families program could provide essential support, helping them manage their health and well-being during and after pregnancy. We also understand the importance of maintaining and strengthening the bond between a mother and her child, during pregnancy and after giving birth.

We are grateful to the staff, at the multiple facilities we have worked in, for inviting and allowing Health Families ND to come into the facility to provide support and services to the women facing pregnancy along with incarceration.

Over the last 6 years of providing these services we have been blessed to walk alongside many women as they journey through their pregnancy, supporting them with birth plans, having tough conversations about who will care for their child, and encouraging them to consider options such as breastfeeding and pumping.

Although we know that being part of our Healthy Families ND program makes a difference for the mom and baby, we also see first hand how challenging it is when an incarcerated mother has to be separated from her baby after giving birth. Typically when we work with mom's who are expecting, it is a time of joy and excitement as they near their due date, but with mom's who are incarcerated it can feel like an impending doom as they know they may only have 24 to 48 hours after giving birth with their child before they are separated. The mother often experiences intense feelings of grief, guilt and helplessness. It is heart wrenching as she is unable to provide the immediate care and bonding that is crucial for her and the baby's health.





The baby misses out on essential bonding time, which we know through research is important for emotional and psychological development, impacting the baby's sense of security and attachment.

It has been our hope for North Dakota to become a place where we recognize that by supporting incarcerated mothers and their babies, we will be breaking the cycle of intergenerational incarceration. Children will grow up with a strong bond to their mothers and mothers will be supported as they make positive changes in their lives, focusing on being a mom along with the rehabilitation and reintegration into society. The presence of a nurse program provides a supportive environment where mothers can learn hands-on parenting skills, receive mental health support and prepare for a successful transition, with their child, into the community.

We look forward to the day when we can provide our Healthy Families ND services to support incarcerated moms from pregnancy, through participation in a prison nursery program and all the way to their release and reintegration into the community with their babies!

I urge you to vote yes on SB2352. Thank you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Missi Baranko".

Missi Baranko
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USpireND

WITH YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY

