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Committee Testimony for Senate Bill 2115
Senate Judiciary Committee

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee.

Thank you for considering my testimony today. I serve as the Executive Director of Ministry on the Margins and am currently out of town but feel very strongly about this legislation.

It is an often-used phrase, “I was raised in a totally different world than her.” However, I remember the moment I was sitting in the North Dakota Women’s Prison and knew – knew very deeply – that I was conceived into a different world than the woman before me. My mother didn’t smoke, drink, or use drugs while she was pregnant with me. She watched her nourishment; had comfortable housing and a supportive spouse while I was being formed in her womb. I was born in a hospital, mom was assisted in mothering skills, I was cared for and carried home to the song “I will take you home Kathleen.” I began my life connected to family.

Senate Bill 2115 offers the opportunity for a child whose growth in the womb happens while his or her mother is in prison to also have a strong start in life (maybe a different song). SB 2115 recognizes that because mom is incarcerated, this baby and mother probably have better maternal care than ever with medical attention, housing, nutrition, non-abuse, and drug/alcohol free. This bill continues a hopeful trajectory of success by allowing mother-baby bonding to continue post birth, immediately wrapping both in formation for good mothering skills.

If the baby is born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or other challenges, early intervention can happen without delay. If the mother is victim of generational patterns of neglectful parenting, new skills can be taught. Financial costs within the foster care system can be saved. Financial costs and the burden of transportation for mother-baby visits can be saved. Financial costs of deferred intervention can be saved.

And as a person who has accompanied women as they try to re-enter society from prison, I can attest to the overwhelming panic and failure that accompanies re-entry when it is done unprepared with a baby in arms. A baby that had been taken from his/her mother at the time of birth, begun the journey of growth separated from this primary connection, and subsequently removed from whoever had been providing early nurturing and given to another new person – a stranger called mom.

I emphasized the newborn reality of this legislation. It is broader, hence, Section 2 charges the DOCR to establish policies and procedures for this and the continuing mother-child bonding.

Senate Bill 2115 is not primarily for the woman who gives birth while incarcerated. It is for the vulnerable new life born into a totally different world than you and me, and an investment in *THEIR* future.

I ask you to support this legislation.