

# HB 2535 – Better Beginnings for Babies

## Creating a Doula Program at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility

### As amended, HB 2535 will:

1. Create a doula program at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility (CCCF) to ensure access to trained professionals who can assist with physical, emotional, or informational support to a pregnant woman before, during, and after delivery.
2. Require the Department of Corrections to make reasonable accommodations for doula services.
3. Allow the Department of Corrections to partner with trained community professionals to provide doula services.
4. 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.
5. Require procedures for return to facility after giving birth are the least invasive necessary.
6. Require development of a process for documentation on the use of restraints & recommendations for improving procedures that incorporate feedback from listening sessions.

In 2017, Oregon took the bold move to become the first state in the country to put the Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents in statute. These eight rights are intended to safeguard children who suffer tremendous consequences when their parent becomes incarcerated.

When we consider the intent of giving voice to those who may not be able to speak for themselves, we should be especially concerned with pregnancy, childbirth and the post-partum periods. **Every birth that occurs within the carceral system, becomes a child's birth story.**

While most facilities do not collect data on pregnancy status, the Department of Justice estimates that **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.

This comes with unique health risks. Compared to women in the general population, pregnant incarcerated women have a higher risk of poor birth outcomes, such as preterm birth and babies who are especially small for their age.

Though some support is available to pregnant incarcerated individuals, prison's are not resourced to provide the kind of care necessary to ensure the most loving and humane birth possible for every child.

Additionally, shackling during childbirth is no longer allowed per state policy, shackling up until active labor and immediately post-partum remains a sanctioned practice.

***Babies do better when a doula is present.***



## WHAT IS A DOULA?

A trained professional who provides continuous physical, emotional and informational support to a mother before, during and after childbirth to help achieve the healthiest and least traumatic birth experience possible.

## WHAT DOES A DOULA PRISON PROGRAM DO?

- **Prenatal Care:** Doulas meet with expecting mothers in prison to provide information, child birth education, birth plans, encouragement, and mental health support.
- **Labor and Delivery:** Doulas serve as advocates and mediators between the incarcerated women and hospital personnel. They are the sole support person for women during labor, delivery, and separation from their baby.
- **Postpartum Care:** Doulas provide updates on the baby, articulate birth stories, and provide supports in screening for postpartum depression. They help connect to services like Expressions of Care and the Family Preservation Project.

## IMPACTS TO SAFETY & SECURITY?

Researchers Schroeder and Bell noted high satisfaction from officers who participated in doula programs. A 2020 study concluded that maternal and child health policies and programs “did not interfere, and in some cases helped with their primary job task of maintaining safety and security” (Pendleton et al.)

## THE BILL OF RIGHTS FOR CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

While we cannot remove the obstacles and traumas faced by children of incarcerated parents, Oregon has acknowledged that we must recognize their needs and prioritize their rights by codifying the Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents (SB 241, 2017). This means that the state acknowledges that we must ensure that every child whose parent is arrested and/or incarcerated is guaranteed those rights.

Providing doula services is an actualization of the Bill of Rights, making sure we are providing every opportunity for a healthy pregnancy and birth, removing unnecessary barriers to a child’s ability to thrive.

## IMPROVED BIRTH OUTCOMES

- **28%** fewer C-Sections
- **12%** more vaginal births
- **34%** fewer negative birth experiences
- **31%** reduced use of Pitocin
- Reduced Postpartum Depression



## IMPROVED BREASTFEEDING

- Research has shown that doula support for women in custody increases the likelihood of initiating breastfeeding (Asiodu et al.)
- Infants who experienced delayed breastfeeding initiation (from 2 to 23 hours after birth) had a **33%** higher risk for neonatal mortality than those who breastfed within 1 hour of birth (Smith et al.)
- Improved breastfeeding rates and initiation can lead to cost-saving benefits.



## C-SECTION COST REDUCTION

**\$16,010** Avg. OR vaginal birth cost \*

**\$26,765** Avg. OR C-section birth cost\*

**\$10,755** Potential savings

*\*per Health Care Cost Institute*



of greater portland

