



Shackled Babies

*Every child is **shackled** to their mother's health care, or lack thereof, during pregnancy.*

Minna Long, 23, was pregnant with twins when she entered a County jail in 2010. She received an extra eight-ounce carton of milk with all three meals, but she recalls: "There were countless times the milk was expired and sour and I couldn't drink it."

Why Shackled Babies?

- The Vermont code (§801a. Pregnant inmates), focuses on the use of shackling and restraints on pregnant women.
- Northern states are among the highest percentage of prisons in the United States that still use shackling as a method of restraint while women are in active labor.
- Because shackling is still frequently utilized in these prison systems, pregnant incarcerated women are treated inhumanely (Kelsey, Medel, Mullins, Dallaire, & Forestell, 2017).
- The Rebecca Project reported that many correctional facilities in the United States do not require mandatory medical examinations as a part of prenatal care and do not provide education, counseling, HIV screenings, or special diets for pregnant women (Kelsey et al., 2017).

Room for improvement?

- With a growing population of women, prisons must adjust to accommodate their varying needs, especially when it comes to areas as life altering as pregnancy. In comparing 22 different state prison systems, researchers discovered that Vermont had the highest percent of miscarriages at 25% (Sufrin et al., 2019).
- Not only should pregnant women be protected from undue restraints, but they should also be provided with proper prenatal care.
- Pregnant women should visit a doctor once a month in the first 28 weeks of pregnancy, twice a month until 36 weeks is reached, and then weekly until the baby is born. Any recommendations the doctor specifies should be provided including vitamins, special nutrient rich diets, and environmental

Why is this information important?

- According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, when mothers fail to receive prenatal care, their babies are three times more prone to low birth weight and five times more likely to lose their lives (2019).
- One study found that out of 1,396 pregnant women admitted to prisons, there were 46 miscarriages (6%), 11 abortions (1%), 4 stillbirths (0.5%), and 3 newborn deaths. Of live births, 6% were preterm and 30% were cesarean deliveries.



Why should you care?

- A study found that when the mother experienced more anxiety and depression during pregnancy, their children had more emotional and behavioral problems later in life (Leis, 2014).
- By advocating for pregnant women, including those who are incarcerated, society will be benefitted by adding to it a healthier future generation.



What can I do?

- Fight for this injustice by bringing light to this issue.
- Advocate for the addition of requirements regarding prenatal care to this policy by contacting your elected officials of the state of Vermont.



References:

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