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Bill Introduced to Limit Shackling of Pregnant Women Hearing to Be Held Monday, Jan. 18 at 1:30 p.m. in House Human Services Committee



OLYMPIA, Wash. – Legal Voice, the ACLU of Washington, and the National Organization for Women applaud legislation to protect the health of women by limiting the ability of prisons, jails, and other Washington correctional facilities to use shackles and other restraints on pregnant incarcerated women. Such practices are especially inhumane during labor, delivery, and immediately after childbirth.

The legislation (HB 2747, Senate bill to be dropped tomorrow) is sponsored by Rep. Jeannie Darneille (Tacoma) and Sen. Karen Fraser (Olympia).

In June of this year, Legal Voice filed a lawsuit on behalf of Casandra Brawley, who was shackled throughout her labor because she was incarcerated at the Washington State Corrections Center for Women. That lawsuit is pending in federal district court in Tacoma. As Ms. Brawley explains: “I felt like I was treated like an animal, not like a human being. It was so degrading. I hope no woman ever has to go through that again.”

“Shackling pregnant women is a barbaric practice that has no place in a modern criminal justice system,” said Jennifer Shaw, Deputy Director for the ACLU of Washington.

“It defies common sense to risk a pregnant woman’s health, safety, and dignity by shackling her while she is in the process of giving birth,” said Sara Ainsworth, Senior Counsel at Legal Voice and co-counsel for Casandra Brawley. (Ms. Brawley may be reached through Ms. Ainsworth.)



National medical associations, including the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, decry the practice of shackling laboring women because it causes needless suffering and poses a danger to women and their pregnancies. Lawmakers in Texas, Arkansas, New Mexico, and New York last year acted to ban or limit the use of restraints on pregnant women. Illinois, California, and Vermont already have limited the use of restraints on pregnant women, as has the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

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