



Incarcerated Women and Pregnancy

Often times when we talk about pro-life issues, we forget some of our most vulnerable people and the challenges they face in their day-to-day lives. One such group of vulnerable people is incarcerated pregnant women. In many states of the United States, the rights and dignity of pregnant, incarcerated women are often overlooked. Below is a short example from Chicago Legal Aid for Incarcerated Mothers (CLAIM) about Shawanna Nelson, a pregnant woman incarcerated in Arkansas, who had to deliver her baby while shackled to a bed:

“Shawanna Nelson was shackled during labor while serving a sentence for credit card fraud and bad checks in Arkansas. She sustained a permanent hip injury, torn stomach muscles, and an umbilical hernia requiring surgery. She now cannot sleep or bear weight on her left side, cannot play with her children and cannot take part in athletics. Her doctors have advised her not to have any more children.”

You can see Shawanna Nelson's YouTube interview here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWj1uHdxnt8>
(Source: CLAIM)

National Advocates for Pregnant Women works towards ending the inhumane treatment of pregnant and laboring women in prison. They state:

“The movement to end the shackling of pregnant and laboring women continues to build around the country. At least one other woman who was shackled during pregnancy and childbirth has brought a similar federal suit with the help of Legal Voice (formerly the Northwest Women's Law Center). This year Texas, New Mexico and New York joined Illinois, California, Vermont and the Federal Bureau of Prisons in banning the use of restraints on incarcerated pregnant women and women in labor. Advocates from numerous organizations deserve credit for these victories. Even so, the fact that Nelson (from Shawanna Nelson's case from above) was decided by such a narrow margin, and with a vociferous dissent, shows how far the U.S. still has to go in the recognition of the rights and dignity of pregnant and incarcerated women.” (Source: National Advocates for Pregnant Women).

Statement on Abortion

In 1974 the Catholic Peace Fellowship, which counted Catholic Worker Movement founder Dorothy Day among its members, wrote a statement on abortion which has become a guide for Catholic leaders. The following is an excerpt from the original text:

For many years we have urged upon our spiritual leaders the inter-relatedness of the life issues: war, capital punishment, abortion, euthanasia and economic exploitation. We welcome the energetic leadership our bishops are giving in the abortion controversy and we are proud to join our voices with theirs. At the same time we must point out that, ultimately, the sincerity of our words and theirs on any of these issues will be measured by our readiness to recognize and deal with the underlying social problems which turn many people to these deadly alternatives, to condemn all forms of social and economic injustice and to work for their elimination and the establishment of a social order in which all may find it easier to be “fully human.” (Source: Consistent Life)

Actions:

1. Find out more information on incarcerated mothers at:
<http://advocatesforpregnantwomen.org>.
2. Become an advocate of incarcerated women through political action
3. Read the full text of the Statement on Abortion at:
<http://www.consistent-life.org/cpf.html>