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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 523:  
Correctional Services - Pregnancy and Postpartum Support  
(Prevention of Forced Infant Separation Act)**

TO: Chair Luke Clippinger and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Nora Achrati

DATE: Friday, February 17, 2023

I am a resident of MD District 39, longtime Marylander, and mother of two.

**I strongly support House Bill 0523 as a means of promoting secure attachment between infants and their birth parent, and of advancing better health outcomes for both children and parents. The practice is unconscionable and needs to end.**

I was aghast to learn that newborns born to incarcerated individuals in Maryland are separated from their birth-parents as soon as the parent is discharged from the hospital – an average of 1 to 2 days after giving birth. The newborn is then placed with a secondary caregiver or into the foster system. This practice is well-documented as traumatic for both parents and babies, and severely disrupts not only the formation of a healthy bond between them, but the individual health of separated parent and child.

The practice of infant separation has serious consequences for parents, increasing maternal depression, feelings of extreme powerlessness, grief, and detachment. Children affected by this policy experience insecure attachment and a wide range of subsequent issues, including academic difficulties, mental health struggles, diabetes, heart disease, and lower life expectancy. And, in addition to negatively impacting not only birth parents, but babies born behind bars through no fault of their own, current Maryland policy disproportionately impacts women of color and exacerbates racial inequities.

The US is one of only a handful of countries that routinely separates infants from incarcerated birth-parents. HB 523 establishes a program to stop this outdated and harmful separation policy and instead facilitates strong, healthy bonds between incarcerated birth-parents and their newborns. It is time for our State to end this barbaric practice. Please, **I urge you to vote favorably on House Bill 523.**

**Sincerely,**

**Nora Achrati**