

Testimony for the US Senate Human Rights Subcommittee

Chairman, members of the Subcommittee,

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Karine Laboy, and I reside in New Britain, Connecticut. My daughter has been incarcerated at York Correctional Institute in Niantic, Connecticut since August 2017. My daughter was around six weeks pregnant when she entered York. I stand before you today as a mother and grandmother to tell you about our family's experience.

From the moment my daughter entered York, her pregnancy added a layer of fear and uncertainty to our lives. Communication with her was very restricted, and I was denied contact for several weeks. When I finally heard her voice, she expressed a lot of distress and fear of being alone. She told me about times where she was denied adequate nutrition and medical attention. She was even threatened with solitary confinement for requesting to be sent to the infirmary. The prison staff forced her to choose between phone calls and recreation time—a cruel decision for any expecting mother.

As my daughter's pregnancy progressed, I attended every court hearing, hoping to see her and reassure myself of her well-being. Every time I saw her in court, she looked sick—sweating a lot while hunched over. It was heartbreaking to witness her in heavy metal shackles around her belly and ankles, a practice that continued throughout her pregnancy.

The darkest moments began in early February 2018 when, for two agonizing weeks, I received no word from my daughter. The days that followed were chaotic and deeply distressing. The Connecticut Department of Children and Families (“DCF”) called me and informed me that she had given birth. DCF asked to meet me at my home to fill out paperwork so I could go meet my granddaughter. Shortly after filling out the papers, I learned that my granddaughter was in

the NICU for being born premature, underweight, and malnourished. When I went to the hospital, DCF met me there so I could meet my granddaughter. During the custody process, I learned that my daughter had been medically neglected and that my granddaughter was born in the prison—not in the hospital like I thought.

I was confused and scared. I knew my daughter was nearby because a nurse told me she had put a big red bow in my granddaughter's hair. I felt relieved to know my daughter saw her baby, but nobody would tell me anything about my daughter or granddaughter. I could not see or talk to my daughter. I later learned that she was shackled to her hospital bed for four days post-delivery—a practice that is not only inhumane but also illegal in Connecticut.

In March 2019, I learned for the first time the full extent of how my granddaughter was born, when my daughter initiated a lawsuit against the prison. The lawsuit, settled a year later, revealed the horrifying truth: my granddaughter was not born in a hospital as I had believed, but into a prison toilet after my daughter's desperate cries for help went unanswered. On February 9, my daughter started experiencing labor symptoms, abdominal pain, and discharge. Medical and correctional staff dismissed her pleas, providing only a heating pad and instructing her to "lie down" for four more agonizing days. She told me she felt like a "caged animal" throughout her pregnancy at York—which pains me to this day.

Through the lawsuit I also learned that, on February 13, my daughter began bleeding while using the toilet and called for help, but nobody responded. Security camera footage shows my daughter placing a t-shirt between her legs and grasping the prison walls for support as she tried to walk to breakfast. When she came back, she sat on the toilet. The t-shirt was completely bloody, and she began to scream for help when she realized her baby was coming. Nobody came.

My granddaughter was born into the toilet bowl. She was unresponsive and not breathing once she was outside my daughter.

If not for my daughter's quick thinking and her cellmate's help to pat my granddaughter's back and get the water out of her, she would not be alive today. When prison medical staff finally arrived, their response was cruel and insensitive. They joked that my granddaughter "took her first swim" and proceeded to cut her umbilical cord inside the dirty prison cell—disregarding the dignity and well-being of both mother and child.

My daughter should have received proper medical care and support throughout her pregnancy, and my granddaughter should have been born in a safe and sanitary environment, not a prison cell. This experience has left us scarred and deeply distrustful of a system that failed to protect my daughter's basic human rights.

No family should endure what mine has suffered. Prisons must do better to ensure families are informed throughout a woman's pregnancy and to prioritize the health and well-being of both mother and child. My daughter was deprived of the medical care she desperately needed. No human being should endure such cruelty and neglect. No mother or grandmother should feel as helpless as I have felt.

I urge this Subcommittee to let my family's ordeal serve as a spark for change, and compassion in our criminal justice system.

Thank you for allowing me to share my daughter's and granddaughter's story.