



May 11, 2016

The Honorable Sheila Jackson Lee  
United States House of Representatives  
2252 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Lee:

The National WIC Association (NWA) envisions a nation of healthier women and children. We offer our strong support for H. R. 5130, the *Stop Infant Mortality and Recidivism Reduction Act of 2016*, otherwise known as *SIMARRA*. This legislation permits the Bureau of Prisons to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the Federal prison system for pregnant offenders by establishing a pilot program of critical-stage, developmental nurseries in Federal prisons for children born to inmates.

NWA is the non-profit education arm and advocacy voice of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). WIC is designed to influence lifetime nutrition and health behaviors for targeted, high-risk mothers and young children. Grounded in nutrition science, WIC is effective, resulting in positive outcomes for vulnerable mothers and young children, including reducing the incidence of pre-term and low birth weight births and reducing infant mortality rates.

Included among the population of high-risk women and infants served by WIC are incarcerated pregnant and post-partum women, representing one of the most vulnerable population groups in the country. Current Bureau of Prison policy dictates that, in most cases, incarcerated mothers must hand their children over to friends, family members or the foster care system. This separation of newborn babies from their mothers leads to weakened attachment and bonding between mother and baby and is associated with increased risk of early infant death and impaired cognitive and social development for children.

Given NWA's strong commitment to the health and well-being of our nation's vulnerable mothers and children, we believe that America cannot afford to lose any of its children or break the nurturing bonds between mother and child. The "*SIMARRA Act*" will decrease current infant mortality rates and provide inmate mothers with a safe and nurturing environment for their pregnancy and an opportunity for bonding with their infants during the first 30 months of life. Currently, ten states successfully operate similar programs, and studies have shown that 71% of the babies served attained attachment goals with their inmate-mothers while in a prison nursery setting, a percentage greater than that reported by most low-risk, community-based children whose mothers had no criminal history or involvement. Mothers participating in these nurseries also had a lower recidivism rate compared to non-participating mothers.

We thank you for your commitment to WIC mothers everywhere and to the health of all of the nation's vulnerable women and children by authoring and introducing H.R. 5130. We look forward to working with you to ensure a healthy and safe environment for infants born to incarcerated women during critical stages of childhood development.

Sincerely,

Rev. Douglas A. Greenaway, President and CEO, National WIC Association

**Janet Jackson Charles**  
Washington  
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