

Rep. Taylor: Statement in opposition to AB 559

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MADISON - Today, Republicans in the state Assembly passed AB 559, an outdated, medically insupportable bill to further punish pregnant women and deter them from seeking addiction treatment and pre- and postnatal care. Wisconsin already has one of the most punitive, extreme laws in the country that allows pregnant women with past or current addiction issues to be incarcerated without access to legal counsel or prenatal care. This bill further punishes women who give birth to a baby exposed to controlled substances or alcohol, who risk losing their babies and permanently losing parental rights.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) has condemned these punitive laws, as they discourage women from seeking the medical care they need to address addiction and pursue a healthy pregnancy and after birth care. ACOG's 2011 policy specifically states "incarceration and the threat of incarceration have proved to be ineffective in reducing the incidence of alcohol and drug abuse" and that mandated testing and reporting lead women to avoid prenatal care that "greatly reduces the negative effects of substance abuse during pregnancy." The American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association and the National Council on Alcohol and Drug Dependence all oppose punitive laws that punish pregnant women experiencing addiction issues.

Representative Taylor issued the following statement:

"Assembly bill 559 is a dangerous bill that threatens maternal, fetal, and child health. This bill reinforces a precedent that, rather than encouraging pregnant women to access necessary healthcare, deters women from seeking medically necessary healthcare during and after their pregnancy. Medical experts agree that these punitive laws backfire. By punishing women, treating them like criminals and

taking their children away, Republicans are discouraging women from addressing issues of addiction and accessing vital pre-and postnatal care. These women will hide in the shadows out of fear.

“We have seen how these laws hurt pregnant women and babies in Wisconsin in the cases of Alicia Beltran and Tamara Loertscher. These are women who tried to do the right thing when they were pregnant in seeking prenatal care and disclosing and/or seeking help for addiction issues. Instead, they were denied legal counsel, incarcerated and forced into inpatient treatment facilities without receiving the prenatal care they needed to have healthy pregnancies.

“Laws including AB 559 are outdated and unsupported by the medical community. But as tragic, they do nothing to maximize maternal, fetal and child health, and actually can have the opposite effect. It is time the Republican majority abandoned these failed policies and truly put the best interests of children and mothers first.”