

Tabatha Trammell Testimony

Good morning Senator Ossoff, and the Subcommittee on Human Rights. Thank you for hearing my testimony today and for making me feel that my voice is important.

My name is Tabatha Trammell. I was born and raised in the city of Atlanta, and I'm the founder of Woman with a Plan, a nonprofit organization that serves incarcerated women and girls. These women and girls are referred to our organization, and they are primarily incarcerated in Gwinnett County Jail. Much of our work entails full-spectrum doula services. A doula is a person who has non-medical training but is present throughout pregnancy and birth to support clients and advocate for their needs. Each year, Woman with a Plan usually serves between 300-350 women and girls with supplies, direct doula services, and referrals.

This organization was birthed from my own lived experience in jail and prison while pregnant 40 years ago. Throughout my pregnancy, I was in so much pain. I was always hungry because the jail and prison staff would never give me enough food. The guards took out their frustrations on us if we asked about the times that the snacks should be given out, or if the food was delayed—and it often was—which is torture when you're eating for two. If those of us who were pregnant didn't act a certain way, we were also punished. I was threatened with solitary confinement if I complained about being in pain or needing to see a doctor, and I was placed in solitary confinement repeatedly, I'd estimate 150 times, mostly when I was in postpartum recovery.

In solitary, I felt extremely depressed and suicidal, because my body was changing, so I just cried and I was always feeling hopeless. I was unaware that I had postpartum depression and wasn't screened for it. I cried and I kept ringing the buzzer for help, but that only delayed my food and delayed my getting period products.

Unfortunately, I have been working with incarcerated women and girls at the Gwinnett County jail and other jails for the last six years, and they are still having the same exact issues that I experienced. The women and girls I work with tell me all the time how no one responds when they're feeling nauseated. When they ask for medicines that can stop the nausea, no one brings them anything. Some of the ladies will call me and tell me how they are in pain from hunger. Many of these women have no support outside the jail, and since commissary items cost money, they can't afford to buy snacks. Woman with a Plan helps educate these women on how to use commissary items to form a healthy diet for pregnancy and serves as a liaison between the women and jail staff to get them enough food, but it isn't enough. They are also supposed to receive supplemental nutrition. While the jail has a system where they give snacks in between meals for pregnant women, that food is usually late, expired, or doesn't come at all. And if the women say anything about it or write a grievance, the staff will retaliate by placing them in solitary confinement.

The jail staff's attitudes towards pregnant women are sometimes hostile. The pregnant and postpartum women fear retaliation. When the women file a complaint, the staff treats you very

differently. They'll try to make outcasts of women who complain. For example, I have seen the staff tell the other pregnant women and authorities at the jail, "she's always making trouble," when in reality a woman simply asked for extra blankets because she's cold. A lot of the pregnant women are anemic. The staff simply does not care! They don't have capacity for your needs and don't want pregnant women to ask for even basic needs.

Additionally, the postpartum period is extremely challenging for women who are incarcerated. I have been in contact with Gwinnett County jail and other jails throughout the state of Georgia, and I have never witnessed an incarcerated woman being able to have direct contact with her child after she has given birth. Although Woman with a Plan advocates on behalf of these women to jail staff, volunteers, and other authority figures to ensure women get the medical care and humane treatment they deserve, they still may not get what they need. The women do not receive enough prenatal care, and their medical conditions are not monitored throughout pregnancy. Many of the women are diabetic and have been diagnosed with preeclampsia but don't get doctor's appointments. Sometimes, women do not even receive toilet tissue, soap, deodorant, or even toothbrushes. When they ask for these things, the staff don't want to be bothered. The women have to wait till a certain staff member who is empathetic comes on duty to get these things for them because the women are ignored or retaliated against.

To ensure justice, my final call to action would be that the standards are changed to the fact that the prisons are more humanized, and the ladies are treated with respect and dignity. Staff in prisons and jails need to see that these women are human. Officers should receive sensitivity training, so they can know how to relate to the different cultures of incarcerated pregnant and postpartum women, as well as to all incarcerated women. They need to see and compassionately respond to signs of postpartum depression and to mental illness.