

## Great News and A Call to Action!

Four pieces of legislation related to children who experience separation from a parent due to incarceration have been introduced in Vermont. This is a significant victory for all of us ---

- For children and families affected by incarceration, it indicates that the community is taking notice and cares.
- For service providers and community members, it indicates that collectively we recognize the need to do better on behalf of children and families.

Many thanks to Representative Jason Lorber, Representative Sandy Haas, Senator Hinda Miller, Senator James Condos, and Senator Diane Snelling for their leadership on this important issue.

I urge you to look over the legislation and write to your own representatives (please copy any messages to Jason Lorber [jlorber@leg.state.vt.us](mailto:jlorber@leg.state.vt.us) so that he can compile all relevant correspondence and help spread the word) and encourage their support of these bills. Follow these links to read the entire text of the bills:

- <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/docs/legdoc.cfm?URL=/docs/2008/bills/intro/H-734.HTM>
- <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/docs/legdoc.cfm?URL=/docs/2008/bills/intro/H-735.HTM>
- <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/docs/legdoc.cfm?URL=/docs/2008/bills/intro/H-736.HTM>
- <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/docs/legdoc.cfm?URL=/docs/2008/bills/intro/S-253.HTM>

### How to locate your representatives:

You can find contact information for your representatives by following this link:

<http://www.leg.state.vt.us/legdir/legdir2.htm>

### In the subject line of your email or letter, please write:

"Please support 'Remember the Children' legislation."

### A Sample Letter for You to Use or Adapt

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I wanted to encourage you, as my representative, to support the "Remember the Children" legislation currently in the House (H. 734, H. 735, H. 736) and Senate (S. 253) that begins to address the plight of children of incarcerated parents.

**Your optional personal story:** I myself have seen the effects on children when parents go to jail ... **\*\* if you have any personal stories – they are the most compelling and powerful tools we have to influence changes in legislation --- please share your experiences here!**

The number of children affected by their parent's incarceration has increased dramatically over the past few years, this is primarily related to the number of incarcerated women as well as sentencing guidelines.

Children of incarcerated parents have a daunting array of needs. They need a safe place to live and people to care for them in their parent's absence, as well as everything else a parent might be expected to provide: food, clothing, medical care. Beyond these material needs, they need to be told the truth about their parent's situation, they need someone to listen to them without judging, they need the companionship of others who share their experience, so they can know they are not alone. They also need the connections that they have (good, bad or indifferent) with their parents be recognized and honored.

Supporting this legislation will have a deep impact on behalf of children whose parents are in the custody of the Department of Corrections. It will show that you recognize that we all share responsibility for creating opportunities in our communities on behalf of children and families. And it indicates that we understand that people who commit crimes may, in fact, be good parents and that they, more likely than not, will remain a presence in their children's lives and will return to our communities.

Rep. Jason Lorber, Rep. Sandy Haas, Sen. Hinda Miller, Sen. James Condos and Sen. Diane Snelling have taken positions on behalf of children who have a parent incarcerated. I hope you will do the same.

I thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

**A bit of background (you may use any of this information in your letters):**

- The number of children affected by a parent's imprisonment in the state of Vermont has risen by 500% in the last 10 years primarily due to an increase in the number of incarcerated women.
- There are an estimated 4,500 Vermont Children annually affected by their parent's imprisonment.
- Children of incarcerated parents shoulder tremendous burdens of shame, guilt, isolation, grief and confusion. Often, not only do they deal with the grief and loss associated with separation from their parent, but also this is coupled with needing to leave their home, their community, their school or daycare, and often their siblings. These children are incredibly vulnerable and in need of support.
- Caregivers of these children enter into an often-fragmented system of services and supports and regularly become overwhelmed. They are often unsure about their role as a caregiver and ill prepared for the financial and emotional demands of caring for a child with sometimes challenging behaviors and complicated emotional needs. These circumstances make already seemingly impossible transitions and adjustments even more difficult. And while children are being cared for in their parent's absence, there is not enough attention or preventive efforts aimed at securing children's futures.
- Service providers interfacing with these children and families often do not consider incarceration as one of the contributing factors of increased stressors and are in need of specialized training in this area.
- On September 24<sup>th</sup>, over 500 Vermonters gathered to discuss the impact of incarceration on children. The response was overwhelming and indicative of the need for Vermont to take a closer look at the needs of these children.

This legislation affords us the opportunity to begin taking a closer look at the policies and practices that impact children – including learning about the children themselves, finding out how many children we are actually talking about and building a system of support that fosters better outcomes and creates opportunities for healthy connections between family members when in the best interest of the child.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions related to this legislation or with regards to children who experience incarceration.

Tara Graham, LICSW  
Kids-A-Part Program Coordinator  
Vermont Children's Aid Society



Kids apart from a parent  
& a part of our community

A program for children  
of parents in prison & their caregivers



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