

TESTIMONY OF COURTNEY FORTIN

LD 1013 – Ought to Pass

An Act to Prevent the Shackling of Pregnant Prisoners

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

April 17, 2015

Senator Rosen, Representative Fowle and members of the Committee, my name is Courtney Fortin, and I am a resident of Biddeford. I am here to testify in support of LD 1013: An Act to Prevent the Shackling of Pregnant Prisoners.

I was arrested on March 13th 2014 and remained incarcerated until June 19th, 2014. At the time of my arrest I was approximately 6-8 weeks pregnant, with my beautiful daughter Aliyana, who is here with me today. During my three months of incarceration, I was transported from the York County Jail to OBGYN at Maine Medical Center in Portland approximately three times and to court twice, for appearances.

During every transport, I was shackled and in York County, in both handcuffs and leg shackles. While shackled I was fearful for the safety of my pregnancy. I had to shuffle along, walking very slowly so that I wouldn't trip and fall on my stomach. York County uses a SUV and van for transport of prisoners. Pregnancy off sets your balance and just stepping up and down from the van without tripping was a challenge.

Being escorted into the hospital by two male corrections officers and in my jail jumpsuit and in shackles was humiliating. The shackles hurt my swollen ankles. It was hard to walk and I had to force the guards to slow down and wait for me. If I had fallen in handcuffs I would not have been able to catch myself. During one of my appointments a nurse asked a guard if my shackles were really necessary and told him that it was dangerous for me to be shackled. He answered "that's how we do it in York County."

I remained shackled during all my medical appointments – even during my ultrasound. Only once were my handcuffs removed, and that was to have my blood drawn. There was a correctional officer present in the room with me during all times. The corrections officer witnessed all of my medical interactions with hospital staff.

In June, I finally returned to court, was sentenced and released. Three months later, I gave birth to a beautiful and healthy baby girl. She has changed my life.

I am here today to share my story so that no other woman has to go through what I went through. Shackling of pregnant women is happening in Maine. I believe no woman should have to feel the fear and humiliation I felt. No woman should be forced to put her safety and the safety of her pregnancy at risk. I ask you to support this bill to prevent other women in Maine from being shackled.