



## UNDERSTANDING PERINATAL INCARCERATION IN NORTH CAROLINA

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**Overview:** Perinatal incarceration occurs when a women during pregnancy and immediately after pregnancy is involved in the carceral system. In the state of North Carolina, pregnant women being held in county jails are sent to the North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women in Raleigh, NC. According to an article released on February 17, 2018 by *The Raleigh News & Observer*, 50 pregnant women were incarcerated in the state prison system, compared to the previous year when a total of 81 women delivered babies while incarcerated.



**Methods:** To understand the issue we first conducted a literature review. Subsequently we conducted phone interviews with health professionals, law enforcement personnel and reproductive justice advocates for their perspectives on perinatal incarceration in North Carolina.

**Defining the Problem:** Correctional facilities in the U.S generally are not prepared to meet the needs of pregnant women. In addition, women that are pregnant while incarcerated often do not receive needed additional mental and emotional health support. According to The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists 2011 report, pregnant incarcerated women are challenged by a lack of adequate prenatal care, inadequate nutrition, and limited resources provided to address concerns with mental illness, and alcohol and substance abuse.

**The Question of Shackling Pregnant Women During Childbirth:** Few correctional facilities have medical facilities for childbirth, requiring women to be transported while in labor. Shackling has been used for incarcerated women. The state of North Carolina has revised its policy so that wrists and leg restraints are no longer used while an inmate is in labor. If the inmate poses a threat to herself, others, or risks escaping then she will be shackled. However, in recent weeks the policy came under scrutiny when two inmates at the North Carolina Correctional Institute for Women were shackled, according to SisterSong, an organization that advocates for reproductive justice.

**Recommendations:** Provide separate facilities for pregnant women, increase resources to address psychological, emotional, and physical needs, strictly prohibit shackling under any circumstances, insure the appropriate training for law enforcement personnel when dealing with pregnant women, provide access to healthier foods and support increased ability to obtain water.