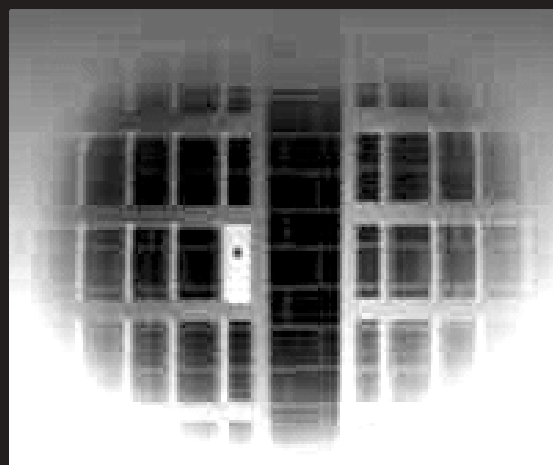


# 10 REASONS WHY PRISONS ARE BAD FOR REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM



## 1. PRISONS DEVASTATE FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES.

The U.S. is the world leader in incarceration, with women entering prison at a faster rate than men. About 78% of incarcerated women have children, and a majority are incarcerated for minor, non-violent crimes. Family ties are inordinately strained when a mother is incarcerated, and children of inmates are at an additional risk of educational failure, joblessness, addiction and delinquency.

## 2. PRISONS POSE A PARTICULAR THREAT TO WOMEN OF COLOR AND POOR WOMEN.

Women of color are the fastest growing prison population in the country today, and most come from under-resourced environments. The criminal justice system severely punishes women who have committed crimes of survival. Women incarcerated for drug felonies are denied public housing and food stamps in many places once they are released, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

## 3. PRISONS PERPETUATE THE CRIMINALIZATION OF SEXUALITY.

Legislation such as recently-repealed sodomy laws stem from the state's desire to control sexual activity in certain communities. The demonization of (female and queer) sexual deviance is commonplace in our culture, and because of our reliance on prisons, this translates into increasing numbers of women and LGBTQ people in prison.

## 4. PRISONS ARE DETRIMENTAL TO WOMEN'S OVERALL HEALTH.

Women in prison are subject to some of the worst health services known to exist. Women suffering from treatable diseases and mental illnesses are often denied medical treatment, gynecological care, and reproductive services leading to the exacerbation of illnesses and dangerous medical procedures that sometimes result in death.

## 5. PRISONS RESTRICT REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE.

Extreme medical neglect in prisons endangers women's health and fertility. Failure to screen for and treat sexually transmitted infections and cervical cancer has led to infertility and preventable hysterectomies. In addition to requiring women to bear the cost of an abortion and transportation to a clinic, prisons often require a court order to visit a clinic, causing long delays that make abortion no longer possible.

## 6. WOMEN IN PRISON FACE SEXUAL ABUSE.

Women in prison face the threat of sexual violence on a daily basis. A high occurrence of rape, sexual assault, groping and extortion on the part of prison guards has been reported. Women are forced to cover up the abuse to avoid physical violence and the denial of visitation rights with their family members.

## 7. PRISONS NEGATIVELY AFFECT PREGNANCY AND MOTHERHOOD.

In some states, poor women and women of color have been charged with abuse, fetal homicide, or drug trafficking if they test positive for drugs during pregnancy. These tests often occur without their knowledge. Prisons criminalize this medical and social problem instead of helping women have healthy babies through drug treatment and prenatal care. In addition, irrational security measures like shackling women in prison during labor further dehumanize women during childbirth.

## 8. PRISONS FOSTER AND PERPETUATE THE INJUSTICES INHERENT IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM.

The criminal justice system's reliance on incarceration poses difficult challenges to women trying to exercise control over their reproduction. Prisons and jails render women's reproductive rights expendable, even though the courts define these rights as essential.

## 9. PRISONS DO NOT MAKE US SAFER.

While the anti-violence movement seeks to protect women by advocating for more police involvement, this strategy is counterproductive in some instances. Communities of color and immigrant communities disproportionately face a threat of violence from the very same law enforcement authorities that are charged with their protection, and women are left with no recourse in the face of violence from both batterers and law enforcement officials.

## 10. THERE ARE ALTERNATIVES TO PRISONS.

We must explore community-based responses to violence that don't rely on the criminal justice system and reevaluate our analysis of violence as individual acts rather than a phenomenon of power structures and oppression. From here we can move forward to create structures that not only end violence, but advance freedom and human rights.

