



Justice Committee

Lord Timpson

Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending
By email only

26 February 2025

Dear Lord Timpson,

Treatment of pregnant women in the criminal justice system

We have been alarmed by recent reports relating to the treatment of pregnant women in the criminal justice system. Our main concerns relate to pregnant women being held in prison on remand and prisoners being forced to give birth while restrained or cuffed to prison officers.

Pregnant women held on remand

As outlined by Minister Dakin in a response to a written parliamentary question, in 2023/24 there were 229 self-declared pregnant prisoners. Of these, over 30% were on remand when their pregnancy was declared to HMPPS.¹ This is a high proportion and a cause for concern given that women in prison have previously been found to be up to seven times more likely to suffer a stillbirth than women in the community, and twice as likely to give birth prematurely.² There can therefore be little justification for holding pregnant women in prison on remand due to the serious risks this could pose to their health and that of their unborn child.

Additionally, due to the ongoing backlog in criminal courts, around one in five women are currently being held on remand for longer than the six-month limit.³ This could apply equally to pregnant women.

Our predecessor Committee's 2023 report on the [role of adult custodial remand](#), cautioned that the criminal justice system was ill-equipped to deal with ever rising numbers of remand prisoners. It also called for greater use of community alternatives to custodial remand, particularly for non-violent offences and improved support for those subject to custodial remand. This is particularly relevant for pregnant women, and women in general who make up just 4% of the prison population.

¹ [Prisoners on remand: pregnancy](#), PQ 9951, 25 October 2024

² [Pregnant women in English jails are seven times more likely to suffer stillbirth | Prisons and probation | The Guardian](#)

³ [Written evidence submitted by Women in Prison \(FPP2025\)](#)



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The Committee notes that the ongoing Independent Sentencing Review decided not to include the use of remand within its remit. The Committee hopes that this will be considered by the Ministry in other ways, such as through the Women's Justice Board.

The Committee would like to see the MoJ take action on reducing the number of pregnant women, and women overall, held in remand. It awaits with interest the results of the work of the Women's Justice Board in this area.

Prisoners forced to give birth while restrained

Of particular alarm have been the recent claims, covered by Channel 4 News, from HMP Bronzefield of women in custody, including those held on remand, being forced to give birth while restrained and/or cuffed/chained to prison officers, sometimes male prison officers. This would be in direct contravention of government guidance which states that restraints should be removed from pregnant prisoners when they attend medical appointments, that restraints should only be used where there is a justification for doing so (e.g., Prevention of Escape) and that prisons should aim to facilitate escort to labour by female members of staff with whom the woman is comfortable.⁴

We are aware that some of the cases covered in recent reports are subject to ongoing legal proceedings and note that Sodexo, who provided the officers in question, have stated this publicly. Therefore, we do not expect the Ministry to address specific allegations at this stage.

However, given the seriousness of the matters raised, **the Committee requests information on the nature and scale of the use of restraint on pregnant women in the criminal justice system. Including but not limited to:**

- **The number of times pregnant women have attended medical appointments or given birth while cuffed/chained to female prison officers since 1 April 2024 and what the justification for doing so was in each of these cases.**
- **The number of times pregnant women have attended medical appointments or given birth while cuffed/chained to male prison officers since 1 April 2024 and what the justification for doing so was in each of these cases.**

⁴ [Pregnancy, Mother and Baby Units \(MBUs\), and Maternal Separation from Children up to the Age of Two in Women's Prisons](#), HMPPS Guidance, 4 November 2024



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- The number of prisons that have failed to comply with government guidance on the restraint of pregnant women attending medical appointments and during childbirth since 1 April 2024.
- The penalties that prisons, private contractors or prison officers have faced or could face if they fail to comply with these guidelines.
- What action the Ministry intends to take in light of recent reports on the restraint of prisoners during childbirth.

Yours sincerely,

Andy Slaughter MP
Chair, Justice Committee