



National Advocates  
for Pregnant Women

N A P W

Gregory L. Gambril  
District Attorney  
Covington County Courthouse  
100 North Court Square  
Andalusia, Alabama 36420-3996

Dear Mr. Gambril,

As physicians, health care professionals, medical ethicists, midwives, child welfare advocates, public health advocates and researchers, we are greatly concerned about your recent statements that your office would begin prosecuting pregnant women and new mothers for continuing to term and giving birth in spite of a drug problem.

While we do not in any way condone a person's use of alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs that might affect pregnancy outcomes or a person's ability to parent, our commitment to the care of pregnant women and their children requires us to speak out against dangerous and counterproductive measures such as the arrest and prosecution of pregnant women and new mothers.

Leading public health groups, including the American Medical Association, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and American College of Nurse Midwives, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the March of Dimes, have concluded that the problem of drug use during pregnancy is a health issue best addressed through education and community-based treatment, not through the criminal justice system. These groups oppose prosecuting for their drug dependency because it can deter women from seeking the prenatal care they need in order to have healthy pregnancies and healthy babies.

Drug dependency is a medical condition, not a crime. Pregnant women do not use drugs because they want to harm their fetuses or because they don't care about their children. Like other medical conditions, drug dependency can be controlled and overcome through medical treatment. Medical knowledge about addiction and dependency treatment demonstrates that patients do not, and cannot, simply stop their drug use as a result of threats of arrest or other negative consequences. In fact, threat-based approaches do not protect children. They have been shown to deter pregnant and parenting women not from using drugs, but from seeking prenatal care and drug treatment.

Health risks to women, fetuses, and children whether from poverty, inadequate nutrition, environment, exposure to drugs, or other factors can be mitigated through prenatal care, counseling, and continued medical supervision. For this to be effective, however, the

patient must trust her health care provider to safeguard her confidences and stand by her while she attempts to improve her health (even when those efforts are not always successful). Converting the physician's examination room into an interrogation chamber and turning health care professionals into agents of law enforcement destroys this trust. The message that is sent is then do *not* seek health care, do *not* seek help for drug problems, do *not* seek prenatal care and do *not* inform your doctor of your situation so that they are better able to treat you.

Many people find it difficult to obtain the help they need to overcome their drug dependency problems. Arresting them not only deters them from seeking help – it likely to deter others from offering compassion and help. In addition to announcing your policy of arrest, you have also asked the community to report pregnant women suspected of using drugs to law enforcement authorities. Far from promoting the health and care of women and children, this destructive policy will discourage women from admitting that they may have a drug problem and asking for help.

We therefore ask you, in the interests of maternal, fetal and child health to abandon the dangerous policy that you announced in favor of punishing pregnant women.

Signed,



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## Authorization

**If you would like to sign on to this open letter please fill out the form below and fax it to NAPW at 212-255-9253.**

By my signature below, I grant the National Advocates for Pregnant Women permission to add my signature to an open letter asking that Prosecutor Gregory Gambri in Covington County, Alabama refrain from prosecuting pregnant women who need treatment not jail.

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Print Organization Name

I am signing on behalf of my organization, you may list the organization on the open letter

I am signing as both an individual and on behalf of my organization, you can use both names in the open letter

Organizational/Individual Contact information:

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Print Name (First Last) and Title

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Street

City

State

Zip

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Email

Phone(s)

Fax

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Signature/Date