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**Legal Voice Files Lawsuit on Behalf of Woman Shackled  
During Childbirth**

*Woman formerly incarcerated at the Washington Corrections Center for Women charges that the Department of Corrections violated its own policy against shackling women in labor*

TACOMA, Wash. – June 25, 2009 – Legal Voice, a women’s rights organization, filed a lawsuit in federal court today on behalf of Casandra Brawley, whose constitutional rights were violated when the Washington State Department of Corrections, against its own policy, shackled Ms. Brawley while she was in labor.

Ms. Brawley was four months pregnant when she began serving a 14-month sentence for second-degree theft. In her ninth month of pregnancy, while in labor, she was shackled by a metal chain around her belly during transportation to the hospital, then shackled by a leg iron to a hospital bed throughout several hours of labor. Her restraints were removed only when a physician demanded she be freed while he performed an emergency caesarian section to deliver Ms. Brawley’s baby. Corrections officers replaced the shackles immediately after her baby was born, even though Ms. Brawley had just had major surgery and was guarded 24 hours per day. Ms. Brawley stated, *“I had committed a crime and made mistakes in my life, but I am still a human being. I was treated like a caged animal. No other woman should have to experience what I went through.”*

“It defies common sense – and the Constitution – to risk any pregnant

woman's health, safety, and dignity by shackling her while she is in the process of giving birth," said Sara Ainsworth, Senior Counsel at Legal Voice and co-counsel for Ms. Brawley. "Like Ms. Brawley, the majority of women incarcerated in Washington State are serving sentences for non-violent crimes. And the idea that labor presents an escape opportunity is absurd. There is simply no justification that outweighs the medical risks of this inhumane, demeaning practice."

National medical associations, such as the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, decry the practice of shackling laboring women because it creates needless suffering and poses a danger to both mothers and babies. Despite the health risks, the practice continues in many states, though at least six state legislatures have passed laws that limit or ban the shackling of laboring incarcerated women, including, most recently, New Mexico, New York, and Texas. In 2008, the federal Bureau of Prisons banned the shackling of pregnant inmates in almost all circumstances during labor, childbirth, and immediate post partum recovery. Washington Department of Corrections policy states "a female offender shall not be restrained during labor or delivery of an infant."

Suffering labor pains, and without a violent history, Ms. Brawley posed a risk to no one. In fact, Ms. Brawley was an exemplary inmate who was released after serving seven months of her sentence and was not required to remain on probation. Since leaving prison, Ms. Brawley has reformed her life and is raising her son and his new baby sister with their father.

The lawsuit seeks damages to compensate Ms. Brawley for the harm she suffered. Michael Wampold, co-counsel for Ms. Brawley, stated, "We hope Ms. Brawley's suit can also help put an end to the practice of shackling laboring women detained in any corrections facility in Washington State."

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