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Assemblyman Daniel O'Donnell  
Chair of the Committee on Corrections  
245 W. 104<sup>th</sup> Street  
NY, NY 10025

**Re: Incarcerated women in NYS**

February 13, 2015

Dear Assemblyman O'Donnell,

Please be advised there appears to be a **system-wide discrimination** occurring at the NYS Board of Parole and the NYS Department of Corrections for women who are incarcerated in this state. As you know, the female inmates represent a smaller number of people incarcerated. However, this does not lessen the state's duty to offer them adequate rehabilitative efforts equal to that offered to the men.

Currently, the women are NOT being given the same opportunities to prepare for re-entry and to address their needs for rehabilitative efforts. This is a systemic problem across the state of NY. The women should be afforded the same opportunities and an equal opportunity to seek freedom.

As stated, in the correspondence I include with this letter, the women housed in Taconic are being denied the opportunity to qualify for their merit time because the facility did not hire a teacher to teach the General Business program and this is the case in **excess of 6 months**. There is no excuse for this.

Additionally, despite the high percentage of substance abuse issues with the population of the incarcerated, this prison has **no Narcotics Anonymous Program**. The women are not afforded the opportunity to participate in **YAP or the "Rehabilitation through the Arts"** which is offered at a large number of male facilities in the same area.

Additionally, troubling is the NYS legislature provided an exception in the law for work release. This exception was created so women who killed their violent "domestic violence" spouse could be eligible even with a conviction for murder to participate in the work release program. It recently came to my attention this exception is not afforded the women at Taconic and that they are routinely being denied the opportunity for work release. The jail is not even processing their applications and denying work release because they were convicted of murder. This is contrary to the law.

Please conduct an investigation of these complaints and ensure the women are afforded the same opportunity as the men when incarcerated in NYS. This is a very serious and troubling issue as a state we deny the women the same right to be rehabilitated, and or seek re-entry skills so that when they leave prison they too can create a better life for themselves as re-entering citizens. Thank you for your attention to these matters.

Sincerely in the struggle,

Cheryl L. Kates-Benman Esq.