

Pregnant Prisoner Shackled During Childbirth Settles Civil Rights Suit Against PA Department of Corrections

PITTSBURGH, PA, March 14, 2012--The Women's Law Project, a Pennsylvania-based public interest law center, announced today that a settlement was reached in a federal civil rights lawsuit filed by Amanda Blades, a former prisoner who alleged that she was forced to give birth to her baby son en route to a hospital while her wrists and legs were shackled.

The Women's Law Project joined the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project in litigating Ms. Blades' civil rights action, which was filed in the United States District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania. The settlement, occurring approximately a year after the commencement of the lawsuit in February 2011, was achieved as a result of mediation with U.S. Magistrate Judge Maureen Kelly. The terms of the settlement are confidential.

In her suit, Ms. Blades alleged that she was four months pregnant at the time of her incarceration at SCI-Cambridge Springs in February 2009. Ms. Blades claimed that on June 2, 2009, she presented to the prison's medical clinic with significant pain and bleeding but was largely ignored by the nursing staff. According to Ms. Blades, after a significant delay, the prison staff restrained Ms. Blades with leg shackles and wrist shackles with a black box (a device used to further constrict wrist and hand movement) and transported Ms. Blades to a hospital via ambulance. Ms. Blades alleged that during this ride, she asked for the removal of the restraints but was refused and even advised by a prison guard to "stop pushing." However, Ms. Blades ultimately gave birth to her baby son in the back of the ambulance en route to the hospital while her legs and wrists were fully restrained. Ms. Blades alleged that she suffered pain and extreme emotional distress as a result of this chain of events.

Since the June 2009 birth of Ms. Blades' baby, Pennsylvania passed a state anti-shackling law to address such practices. The law prohibits the shackling of pregnant women in the second or third trimesters of pregnancy during transport and generally prohibits the use of restraints on women in labor. "We are very pleased that Ms. Blades will be able to put this appalling experience behind her," said Tara Pfeifer, staff attorney with the Women's Law Project. "Her courage and determination will help ensure that Pennsylvania's new anti-shackling law is properly and appropriately implemented system-wide going forward."

The Women's Law Project, with offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, PA, engages in high impact litigation, advocacy and education, and is one of the few public interest law centers in the nation devoted to women's rights, and the only one in Pennsylvania. The Pittsburgh, PA office proudly celebrates its 10th Anniversary this year with "Rights to Realities – Ten Years of Action in Western Pennsylvania," featuring celebrity speaker, actress and activist, Kathy Najimy. The event will be held on April 20, 2012 at 6:15 p.m. at The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust's Education Center. Information about the event can be found at the Women's Law Project's website, www.womenslawproject.org.

The Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project, with offices in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Lewisburg, PA, seeks to deliver civil legal services to the institutional population of our Commonwealth. The Project was created and designed to meet the needs of low income residents of Pennsylvania's prisons, jails, state hospitals and state centers and its goal is to ensure equal access to justice for institutionalized persons. For more information about the Project, please visit the Project's website, <http://www.pailp.org/>.