Arizona prison forced pregnant inmates into induced labor

Alex Findijs
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Three pregnant inmates at the Perryville prison in Goodyear, Arizona, were forced into induced labor according to a recent investigation by the *Arizona Republic*. Medical records from the prison and interviews with the women indicate that all three were given medical procedures to induce labor before their due dates.

Stephanie Pearson and Desiree Romero were both induced at 39 weeks in 2022 and Jocelyn Heffner was induced at 37 weeks on two separate occasions in 2020 and 2022 during separate sentences.

All three women claim that they were told that it was a departmental procedure for the Arizona Department of Corrections to induce all pregnant women and that they were given no other explanation for why they were being induced into labor.

Arizona's prison health care contractor NaphCare denied having a policy of induced labor and the Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC) has refused to comment on the alleged policy upon inquiries by the *Arizona Republic*. However, the ADC's Medical Service Technical Manual does not make any mention of induced labor policies in its "Counseling and Care of the Pregnant Inmate."

Romero said that she was repeatedly told by the ADC's medical provider that it is an established policy to induce all pregnant women one week before their due date.

All women said that they were given no choice in the matter and that they believe the prison induced their labor to avoid liabilities from births inside the prison.

Attorneys from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) documented a case at Perryville in 2019 where a mentally ill inmate gave birth to a child in the toilet of her cell. Their report detailed that the inmate was sent to a hospital after her water broke only to be returned to the prison before giving birth for a reason that remains unexplained.

The report on the Perryville prison also notes extensive mistreatment of pregnant women. In one instance a woman was shackled, against state law, while in transit to a hospital. It also documented a lack of proper nutrition and hygiene products for pregnant women, improper postpartum medical treatment, and at least one miscarriage potentially caused by improper treatment by prison staff.

"They induce us all now so that we don't go into labor in prison," Romero said, according to the *Arizona Republic*. "I'm quite used to the prison making all these decisions for us because we are still state property."

"I felt like I was viewed as a liability and walking around a prison yard nine months pregnant didn't comfort this state institution," added Heffner, who said she had challenged the decision to induce her labor but was denied twice. "Most ladies get induced here, I've caught on to," she said.

Pearson noted that she was never informed of the risks that might be involved with the procedure, which can be significant if done without the full consent of the mother and if it is done before 39 weeks of pregnancy.

"Just because I made some bad choices in my life," she said, "they [the prison] shouldn't be allowed to make bad health choices for me and my baby."

The decision of the prison to force the women into labor reportedly resulted in the inmates suffering through labor for an extended period of time. Person said her labor lasted for three days while Romero's lasted for two.

"It makes your body do something it's not ready for, and the baby isn't ready for. It stresses the baby and the mother out," said Pearson. "It's a lot more active labor, which means a lot more contractions, and harder

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contractions. After the birth, I was in so much more pain than my other ones, and it took a lot longer for my body to heal."

The women were also given substandard healthcare and prenatal care. Pearson was denied breast pads after giving birth and all women say that they were only given an extra serving of milk each day and occasionally a peanut butter sandwich. Pregnant women in their third trimester require around 2,400 calories a day to provide adequate nutrition to themselves and the baby.

Specific dietary information for the Perryville prison is not available, but nearby Maricopa County prisons are known for providing the cheapest prison meals in the country following cuts to food provisions under fascistic sheriff Joe Arpaio's tenure.

Adding to the poor treatment of the inmates, two of the women report that they were billed for their medical procedures despite protesting against them and the fact that the ADC bears financial responsibility for all medical procedures conducted on inmates.

This is not an uncommon problem for Arizona prisoners. A report from KJZZ found that more than a dozen former inmates were being pursued by debt collectors for medical bills incurred while in prison. The State of Arizona has contracts with medical providers which pay a set amount per inmate to cover medical care. However, any third-party medical services not covered by the medical provider are billed to the inmates, often in the thousands of dollars.

Even when medical contractors are supposed to cover bills, they may simply refuse to pay, leaving inmates with the bill. Contractor Corizon Health has a contract for $188 million with the State of Arizona. Corizon has been met with several lawsuits alleging its failure to pay for medical services, and several court documents outline a history of Corizon failing to pay bills it was contractually obligated to cover.

Such failures included multiple women at the Perryville prison who have been left with hundreds and even thousands of dollars in medical bills they were never supposed to be responsible for.

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