Shackles on Women During Active Labor and Immediate Postpartum

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WHEREAS, Incarcerated individuals who are pregnant are frequently shackled throughout their pregnancy, including during labor, delivery, and the immediate postpartum period, and

WHEREAS, the use of shackles during labor and immediate postpartum care interferes with the ability of health care providers to safely care for the patient and fetus, which can lead to delays in appropriate evaluation and subsequent administration of potentially life saving measures and

WHEREAS, in the United States approximately 64% of women in prison have been convicted of non-violent crime, and

WHEREAS, no escape attempts have been reported among pregnant incarcerated women who were not shackled, and

WHEREAS, ambulation during active labor and delivery improves pain management in labor and increases the likelihood of having a vaginal delivery, and

WHEREAS, the ability for people to move or be moved during active labor and delivery is essential to the proper management of many obstetrical emergencies as outlined in the American Academy of Family Physicians, Advanced Life Support in Obstetrics curriculum, and

WHEREAS, skin-to-skin contact is the standard of care for healthy newborns in the newborn period to optimize the infant’s health during the neonatal transition, facilitate bonding, and decrease pain during neonatal procedures, and

WHEREAS, pregnant and postpartum individuals are at increased risk of venous thromboembolism, a major cause of maternal mortality in the United States, and

WHEREAS, limited mobility further increases risk of venous thromboembolism, and

WHEREAS, both the American Medical Association and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists have policies opposing the shackling of immediate postpartum patients and individuals in active labor, and

WHEREAS, the safety of medical staff is of utmost importance and must be ensured with adequate correctional staff and use of restraints only in situations when there is risk of imminent harm, and
WHEREAS, federal courts have ruled that shackling during active labor violates the 8th Amendment to the United States Constitution, now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the American Academy of Family Physicians oppose the shackling of incarcerated people who are in active labor and during the postpartum period, considered to be six to eight weeks after delivery, with proper safety protections for the healthcare team.