

**Congresswoman Mary Fallin
Solutions Initiative Summit
April 30, 2010**

“I am glad to see this issue receiving the critical attention it deserves. Having worked in prison ministry and chaired the first task force on Oklahoma’s female incarceration rate in 2004, I am pleased to be a part of continued work on an issue so crucial to the future of our state. Those of us who have been involved in this issue for a long time know it reaches far below the surface of our culture and society than what the initial topic might suggest.

“Statistics show us overwhelmingly that the family of origin is probably where the pattern of dysfunction or instability started in the first place. For example: 61% of the women currently locked away in Oklahoma facilities came from a home where at least one person had an alcohol problem, 46% with a drug problem, 61% where a parent suffered from mental illness, 66% report physical and/or sexual abuse as a child and 71 % report physical abuse as an adult.

“If you fully understand the cyclical nature of abuse and addiction, which by the way are two of the common denominators for the majority of non-violent female offenders, the idea of returning the child of a prisoner to his or her other parent or grandparent doesn’t make much sense because the cycle begins again. Instead of rescuing the child, we just create a breeding ground for another young offender.

“The fact that Oklahoma’s incarceration rate for women was higher than any other state in the nation was more than a statistic, it was symptomatic of a much deeper problem in our society. It speaks to poverty, education, domestic abuse, sexual abuse, substance abuse and a host of other issues that must be addressed. Just treating the symptom itself won’t make the deeper problem go away. This is a bipartisan issue that makes sense to address for a number of reasons if for nothing else than pure economics. By breaking this cycle, and that is exactly what it is, a generational cycle, we increase self sufficiency and lower dependency on the government. I also want to make it perfectly clear that the type of female offenders we are talking about here are non-violent offenders who have a chance to contribute to society. Not violent criminals with a long criminal history who pose a threat to society.

“There are consequences for bad decisions as there should be, but we must be sure these consequences are not passed on to the children who weren’t responsible for those decisions. Study after study shows that by handling this problem in the traditional way, those consequences are being passed on to all of us in the form of generational poverty, substance abuse and crime. That’s why the work of this summit is so important and I so grateful for the work that has been done.”