

Visible Voices Statement
Equal Voice Town Hall Meeting



I am a member of Visible Voices and CLAIM, and I speak for women who were locked up. We are black and white and brown. We are sisters. We are daughters. We are mothers.

We suffer violence as children, and later, as women. So we serve time for drug possession. For retail theft. For “felony prostitution”. We ask for treatment for our addiction and instead they lock us down. They put our children in foster homes where **they** may be abused.

Prison is not safe. There is no correction. It is the “Department of **Corruption**”. It violates our bodies and our spirits. Just as we were abused in our own homes and communities, we suffer disrespect, physical violence and sexual violence from officers inside. When we go home, even if we do everything right, stay clean, stay out of trouble, the police arrest us as prostitutes. Our prison time is just a down payment. We pay in installments for the rest of our lives.

There is no help for us with our children and families. Prisons are so far away that most of our children never get to visit us while we are away. Even though children need to see their mothers, there are few programs to support that. Foster care workers don’t inform us about our children’s hearings, or help us get the services we need to get our children back. When we come home, we may find that our children are no longer ours. Their birth certificates have another name listed as their mother. In the eyes of the law, we don’t even exist. Even if we love them. Even if we turned our lives around. Even if our children still love us and need us. Our children may be adopted without our consent, and we can’t see them again even if the adoption falls through. So our children risk being the next generation locked up.

We have been invisible and voiceless for too long. So today we stand up to be visible. We speak so that our voices may be heard. Change **is** possible. Truth **will** prevail because together we are powerful.