

Testimony before the Judiciary on Criminal Justice Committee

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Jason Shanks

President, Greater Columbus Right to Life

Good morning, Chairman Grendell and members of the Judiciary on Criminal Justice Committee. My name is Jason Shanks. I am the President of the Greater Columbus Right to Life, and I am here to urge your support for HB 280. HB 280 increases the penalty for domestic violence against a pregnant woman. The bill will also require abortion facilities to post signage ensuring that women know that no one can force them to have an abortion.

While there are probably very divergent views on the matter of abortion represented in this room, I think it is worth noting that this legislation is not about abortion as much as it is about protecting pregnant women from abuse. Indeed, this is an issue that both the Pro-Life movement and supporters of abortion should be able to support. No woman, especially a pregnant woman, should have to suffer abuse at the hands of the person or persons who should most support her during her pregnancy. It is estimated that between 8 and 20% of pregnant women suffer domestic abuse. Teenage girls who are pregnant are more likely to be abused physically, and it is also likely that they are being sexually abused. According to the Ohio Department of Health, 40% of assaults on women begin during their first pregnancy. A majority of that abuse continues until the woman is able to prosecute or escape her abuser. More women die in homicides than in any pregnancy related complication. Even the most adamant supporter of abortion should agree that no woman should be abused in this manner. The Board and Members of the Greater Columbus Right to Life believe that all human life is precious and should be protected from conception until natural death.

The second aspect of this bill is intended to remind women that no one can force them to have an abortion. This is not an entirely new concept. Ohio's existing informed consent laws require that a woman who chooses to have an abortion do so voluntarily and without coercion. However, the language on the form is in a small type and a woman may be rushed through the informed consent portion.

We are not here today to debate the abortion issue. Those who support laws authorizing abortion eschew being called "pro-abortion." They argue that their position supports the right of the woman to "choose" between carrying her baby to term and terminating the pregnancy. While the members of Greater Columbus Right to Life strongly disagree with their valuation of the value of a fetus' life, we would challenge them to live up to their own ideals. Anyone who truly supports choice must join our voice in supporting the right of a woman or child to be free from a coerced or forced abortion.

In fact, there is legislation pending in and recently passed by this very committee that underscores the need for this type of legislation. One example is passage of the Adam Walsh Child Protection Act. The legislature saw the need to protect children from sexual predators by increasing the penalties for child sexual predators. With HB 280, this same Legislature has the opportunity to protect children from sexual predators who would cover up their sexual crimes by forcing a girlfriend, daughter, neighbor, or student to have an abortion. Similarly, Senator Fedor has pending legislation that underscores the problem of trafficking of humans in sexual servitude. A woman or child who is kidnapped or compelled into prostitution may very well find herself pregnant. If that is the case, we should ensure that she is not forced into an abortion in the same way that she is forced into sexual servitude.

I appreciate your time and your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions that the committee might have.