

Thank you, Chairman Merrin and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, for allowing me to express support for HB 297, which creates Pregnancy Resource Center Tax Credits. Special thanks to co-sponsors, Reps. Ginter and Powell, along with the other sponsors of the bill. It is a powerful piece of legislation that increases services for the underserved pregnant women served by non-profit, community-based pregnancy centers.

I am currently Vice President of Heartbeat International, a global pregnancy-help organization that has more than 2700 pregnancy centers throughout the globe. There are 160 pregnancy centers throughout Ohio. Our centers provide free services – such as:

- Education about pregnancy options including abortion, parenting, and adoption
- Pregnancy testing
- Ultrasound
- STD testing
- Long-term life coaching
- Parenting classes
- Adoption support
- Lactation training
- Nutrition education to create healthier babies at birth
- Fatherhood classes and mentoring
- Relationship classes

The services at pregnancy centers are free of charge. Most feature limited medical services with a licensed medical doctor at the helm of the medical services division – the doctor is a volunteer. Centers utilize dozens of professionals such as nurses, counselors, social workers, and caring citizens who bring expertise to the centers without charge. Caring volunteers bring great hope and forward-thinking ideas to expectant women in need. Unplanned pregnancy is a life-changing situation that is full of stress, fear of the unknowns, and concern about the future. These women feel alone, but complementary services in a safe, collaborative environment at pregnancy centers bring hope, the ability to consider options, referrals within the community that remove barriers, and the overall knowledge that they are not alone.

Pregnancy centers are organically grown to meet the needs within communities they are in. I started a center in Missouri in 2000 and ran that organization for 18 years. The president of the Chamber of Commerce once remarked that he could see our center was a key to the reduction of teen pregnancies, low birthweight babies, poverty for single moms, child abuse, drug abuse, and a host of other red flag issues that concerned our community.

You see, pregnancy centers put a face on the compassionate care they provide. Statistics show that we can handle crises and trauma better if we have someone standing with us. Pregnancy centers across the great State of Ohio do just that – all for free.

Centers are faith-based, community-supported organizations. Donors give to these organizations because they are fixing local community issues.

When the Tax Credit bill passed in Missouri, our supporters realized they could invest more in the community and our organization. We had a proven record of helping underserved women who needed long-term care to redirect their lives and prepare for adoption or parenting.

We value all the things that the government can do for Ohio communities. The beauty of the tax credit legislation is that it maximizes what the government can do to help women by strengthening the support of pregnancy centers throughout the state.

Pregnancy centers operate with limited staff but have strong volunteer teams that increase the value of every dollar given to the organization. Tax credits are a value-add gift – it increases support for pregnancy centers, and it also increases the assistance given to pregnant women in Ohio. Giving to our Missouri center nearly doubled in 3 years, which allowed us to provide more services and increase our facility space. While I was there, more than 9,000 women received free services.

In Missouri, we matched every donor dollar with \$3-4 of volunteer services as well as gifts in kind. The Tax Credit legislation multiplies the value of government help to women in need.

I hope you've visited a pregnancy center in your community. If you haven't, please make time to do so before casting a no vote. You will be amazed at the services they provide your community and the desperate women who have the daunting responsibility of not only making a pregnancy decision but living with the decision they make.

One client, named Terry, was diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer the same day she was told she was pregnant. She was given intense chemo treatments and could not work during the pregnancy. Because of tax credits and the increased funding of our

organization, we were able to fix Terry's car, pay her utilities and rent, provide weekly life-coaching and food for her. All of that was possible, in part, because our center had funding growth and could create a new program to assist the short-term needs of pregnant women like Terry. Tax credits helped make it possible.

This bill isn't about prolife or prochoice rhetoric. It's about the cries for help from hurting, pregnant women in the communities we serve. Those who may oppose this bill will likely charge a great deal of money for their services. Pregnancy centers do not charge for pregnancy-related services. HB 297 is a good investment for the state because every dollar will be maximized, and families within your communities will be safer, healthier, and more able to thrive within your local area. You can be the heroes who create more help for pregnant women in need.

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