



# CATHOLIC MEDICAL ASSOCIATION OF CENTRAL OHIO

*A CHARTERED GUILD of the Catholic Medical Association*

Written Testimony in Support of SB 23

The Catholic Medical Association of Central Ohio

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February 18, 2019

Chairman Burke, Vice-Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 23, known as the Heartbeat Bill.

We are physicians with decades of experience in clinical medicine, scientific collaboration and research, teaching, and service to our communities in Central Ohio and beyond. We strongly support the Heartbeat Bill and ask that you consider the following in your deliberations.

First, we will not, and need not, use religion or faith to *justify* the protection of the unborn. The truth of the value of human life is buttressed both by scientific and medical facts, discovered by reason and empirical observation; but it is also upheld in the deep, abiding conscience which always seeks the revealed truth given by God. This truth, written on our hearts, is that every person, no matter how small or in whatever stage of development, is sacred and possesses an inviolable dignity simply because they are human.

In the Catholic tradition, respect for human life is prioritized in all stages, from an unborn fetus, to a distressed young pregnant woman, to an elderly man dying of cancer. Catholic hospitals, cornerstones of societal well being represent this innate outpouring of charity. Catholic medical and social teaching recognizes that the best way to care for the human person is to care for her body, mind and soul, so it should not separate morality from healthcare. This commitment to sound scientific practice and ethical medicine upholds the Catholic doctor's legal and professional obligation to patients, no matter how small. Excellent clinical medicine, aligned with firm ethical values, offer a unique combination of medicine that cares for the whole person—whose value is sacred and inestimable. In short, our Christian faith does not blind us to the truth of the value of the unborn, but on the contrary, frames her worth in the context of individual worth and authentic social justice.

Second, the medical facts are clear, and have been, for more than a decade. In "Your Destiny, From Day One," Helen Pearson, writing in the prestigious scientific journal *Nature* published this startling fact: "The mammalian body plan starts being laid down from the moment of conception, it has emerged... Your world was shaped in the first 24 hours after conception. Where your head and feet would sprout and which side would form your back, and which your belly, were being defined in the minutes and hours after sperm and egg united. Just five years ago, this statement would have been heresy..."<sup>1</sup> There is no longer any doubt that the human fetus is a human person, and that no arbitrary line can be drawn based on the continuum of development that could differentiate the value of one stage from another.

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<sup>1</sup>4475 Dublin Road, Hilliard, Ohio 43206. Your destiny, from day one. *Nature*, 418 (July 2002): 14-15.



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In medicine, we place a special emphasis on the heartbeat. The heartbeat is a discernible sign of life at every stage of human existence. When the heartbeat stops, we know a person is dead. When we revive the heartbeat, the person is alive again, brought back from the brink. When we are unsure, we take our stethoscopes out and listen for the heartbeat, or reach down and touch the wrist to feel a radial pulse. We do not measure brain waves, or functionality, or make judgments about how old a person is to know that life exists. *That heartbeat means something* and has always done so in our profession. We know that the existence of a heartbeat means the existence of a human person has been discovered. To state otherwise is simply inarguable and is scientific folly.

Third, principles of philosophical bioethics suggest that what is morally right and wrong are discerned beyond reason alone and must take into account *human experience*. We have had many, many, patients (and even ourselves and our own families) who have experienced the joys of motherhood or fatherhood upon hearing that first heartbeat of their unborn baby. We have also experienced through our patients the tremendous loss of even the first trimester miscarriage—parents who grieve over a *real person*, not a “blob of tissue” or a “part of the mother’s body.” We have cared for women who have had abortions and seen the tremendous mental and physical toll it has had on them. And what is to account for these experiences? What truth about the human person underlies and ties together these clinical and personal experiences? Opponents of SB 23 will argue that “choice” is the ultimate unit of value for society—that caring for a person means non-interference with the desires of another. To them, these experiences are inexplicable. As Catholic physicians, we reject this characterization. We believe that the human person herself constitutes the ultimate unit of value of our society, and every heartbeat means something and should be protected.

Finally, there is no such thing as social justice without and underpinning in which every human life has dignity and is protected. While pro-choice advocates will say that there is not enough money and support and opportunity for single mothers in Ohio (and we agree), we disagree on what the solution to that problem is. It simply cannot be abortion—the killing of unborn human life. We believe that by protecting the unborn from that first heartbeat, that a culture of life in Ohio will be further nurtured, and that it will be impossible for legislators now, or in the future, to ignore economic justice for the poor, health disparities based on race or income, or the breakdown of marriage and the family. When society protects its most vulnerable, and says—you are of value from this moment simply because you are a person—such courage will reverberate to all aspects of medical and social care.

Our collective expertise in caring for families—especially women, children, and the unborn—should not be ignored. We urge the Senate to pass the SB 23 as quickly as possible, and make Ohio a state where all life is precious, and that first audible sign of it—the heartbeat—still means something.

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