Chairman Burke, Vice-Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the committee my name is Reverend Mary Rathke, I pastor the Great Lakes Dream Center church, where we care for those in need. I am a wife, mother of four, a pro-life speaker and helper of the homeless.  I am honored to testify here today. While I am from Michigan my adult daughter Faith roots for the Buckeyes, she lives in Middletown, Ohio. Because she does I feel it is very important to speak on behalf of her and the implications this bill may have on her life.

Protection for all life, no matter the conception or perceived quality, is very important to our family. My birth mother suffers from schizophrenia yet as her child my life is not defined by her mental illness. She was raped on her way home from work one evening, which resulted in my conception. This is used by many as an excuse to say that my life is not worthy of equal protection under the law.  However, the Declaration of Independence says that “All men are created equal” so why are exceptions added to the laws? These exceptions actually discriminate against a group of people who were all conceived in rape. Think about that, I am part of a group of people still legally discriminated against. We would not consider this for any other people group.

When you place a rape exception into a law, you are not protecting the innocent child which is your first priority. Yes, we are sad and compassionate toward victims of rape, however I was a victim as well. We need to protect both mother and child. The mother needs care, counseling and true compassion that does not open the door to abortion which we know adds more guilt and shame in the long run. The child needs equal protection under the law despite their conception. An abortion does not end the memories of the rape, it only ends a life. You don’t kill one victim to help the other feel better, you care for both victims,

My life matters, my children’s lives matter. The lives of all offspring in the womb deserve equal protection under the law at the moment their heart begins to beat. The fact that I was conceived in rape, the fact that my birth mother is mentally ill does not affect my life in the here and now. Each week I lead people who are feeding and helping those in need. I pray with the broken hearted, and counsel those in crisis. I preach and teach those hungry for the truth. It is the duty of the government to protect the most vulnerable in our society not only the homeless and the hurting but the innocent developing humans in the womb as well. Especially from those who have the ability to harm them.

When I was pregnant with my oldest son Matthew, I began having problems right away. In the second month of pregnancy at less than 8 weeks I began bleeding heavily. My doctor sent me in for an ultrasound. My husband and I were relieved when we heard his beating heart and saw him active in the womb. I was told I would not carry him full term because the placenta was not fully attached to my uterine wall and I could end the pregnancy through abortion. I didn’t understand why the doctor would want me to stop his beating heart. I refused the abortion. Matthew was born at 1 lb 8 oz at 27 weeks and needed medical care. But he was home 7 weeks later thriving and healthy.  Matthew has attended University here in Ohio and plans to return for graduate school. He turns 20 next month, and his life was worth saving. It should illegal for a doctor to end the life of a beating heart, their duty is to save life. Matthew’s life is worthy of equal protection under the law.

I am proud of the sponsors of this bill. All beating hearts need to be protected equally. Protecting the lives of the most vulnerable Buckeyes is why you were elected to your positions. You have a great responsibility in passing bills that will defend those who need protection. We are beyond the days of saying a developing child is tissue, I heard Matthew’s beating heart before 8 weeks. If life ends when the heart stops beating, common sense tells us life starts when the heart begins to beat.  And whether you are conceived in rape, or incest, whether you are mentally ill or disabled, whether you will run for office, pastor a church or stay at home with your little ones, we are all created equal and we all deserve equal protection under the law.

Thank you for equally defending all of us.