

Senate Bill 157 opposition testimony  
October 26, 2021

My name is Gabriel Mann. I live in Columbus. In 2008, my wife was pregnant. We'd gotten married a couple years prior and desperately wanted to be parents. We had a cute little house with an extra bedroom where we'd both stashed baby toys and clothes and hopes. We were trying as hard as we could. My wife asked her doctor why it was taking so long. Doc asked her to change her diet and gave her a round of drugs to clear out any potential cysts in her ovaries. So, she stopped eating french fries and suffered the cramps that came with the meds and we tried again. We knew it doesn't happen for everyone, and that idea brought more anger than it did anything else. Then one day, I walked down the stairs and she said "Guess what?!" and I knew. We were in business.

Several months went by and we did all the things you do. Told our families. Told our coworkers. Bought a crib. Bought some tiny clothes. We felt great.

Eight months in, she starts having contractions. We had just taken the La Maze class at the hospital and came home and she couldn't stand. We asked a friend who told us that the hospital was really good about diagnosing false labor, so we went in. They checked her out, but she was in real labor. We weren't at full term, but it was go time.

Twenty-four hours later, my wife delivered our child. The nurse held him up and looked at me and said "This baby has low tone." He was blue and his little arms were played out to the sides. She placed him on a cart and wheeled him out of the room.

Now, you don't know where I'm going with this, do you? It's one of two directions, ain't it? You've heard witnesses give these testimonies before, and you don't know how this will turn out. Well, guess what? Neither did we.

I wasn't in some faraway place. I was a Grant Hospital down the street. You could walk out the back door of this building and hit that building with a golf ball. I wasn't working for some unknown employer. I was a legislative aide for this Ohio Senate. The day before, I had been standing in that corner of this room listening to some guy tell a committee about his life.

I followed the nurse down the hall to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. She placed an oxygen mask on his little face, attached a heart monitor to his chest, and clipped a little pulse ox monitor to his leg. She laid him out under a heat lamp and he looked like the blue plate special at Denny's. They hung a sign on the tray that said "Baby Boy Mann." He didn't have a name. Meanwhile, my poor wife didn't have a clue where her kid and husband went. She was supposed to have a baby shower that weekend, but that would never happen.

The nursing staff was great. We liked most of them. If you listen to enough people tell their medical stories, you'll find that everyone's opinion of health care workers is colored by their health outcome, regardless of whether that was impacted by the competency of care giver. But each and every member of the medical team was committed to doing everything they could to aide and assist my wife and child. They're professionals who care—no matter if we liked them or not.

My kid turned from blue to pink. His heart rate was steady. His oxygen levels stayed high. They wrapped him up in a blanket and told me I could hold him and they wheeled in my wife. There we were, a happy little NICU family.

We named him William after his grandfather. He wouldn't drink from the bottle, and my wife has great insurance, so they said they were going to keep him for a few days. That ended up being three weeks. You don't know what to do because the Ohio Senate only gives so much parental leave and you don't want to spend it all when your kid is living in a box in the NICU.

You've seen the incubator boxes, most likely in commercials from Phillips or GE. "We bring good things to life." What they don't tell you is that the NICU is just one big room. You're in there beside your kid's box and all of the other NICU families. One big room.

One day about a week in, everything felt different. The nurses weren't smiling. They were a little quicker in their step. Something was happening. No one can tell you anything because HIPAA isn't just a meme, but we got a whisper from our nurse. "Stay here." She didn't need to tell us more. They turned off the bright overhead lights at one end of the room, and pulled a curtain over as far as it would reach. Someone had gone in to labor too early. They'd given birth and the nurses and doctors did everything they could, but sometimes everything they can do isn't going to work.

We were sitting there in the NICU — one big room — trying not to watch as this family had the worst day of their lives. We wanted to become invisible. We wanted to disappear into the wallpaper. But we were stuck in this big room because that's where our kid was.

Once the doctors did what they could do, all that family wanted was privacy, dignity, and a few minutes alone with the child they had just birthed and lost. Sometimes all you get is a few minutes, and those are precious. That seriously hurt.

So, you've got this bill, Senate Bill 157. What would Senate Bill 157 do? Your bill would take these moments away from these families and force the medical team to take away that baby's body and keep... I don't know what. Trying?

Senate Bill 157 treats a family different if they know a pregnancy is failing before it ends. I can't put it any plainer than that. If you find out your pregnancy failed because she goes into labor too early, then that's ok with the Ohio Senate; but if you're told by a doctor that your pregnancy failed and they can help you go into labor to complete your loss, then that's somehow shameful and needs immediate legislative intervention?

It didn't matter where that family I watched lose their child was when that child was born, they still would have lost that child. The best medical care in the state can't fix some things. When there are medical solutions, I promise they are being applied. I saw it with my own eyes. Doctors and nurses will do everything they can. We don't need a bill to force them to keep trying when there's nothing to be done. This legislature should not be taking away precious moments from grieving families just to score political points and spread misinformation and shame about abortion.

Please reject Senate Bill 157.

