



Testimony in Opposition to HB 87
Submitted by Molly Rampe
Founder & CEO, JustChoice

Chair Roemer, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Troy, and members of the committee:

My name is Molly, and I am the Founder and CEO of JustChoice.

At JustChoice, we work directly with pregnant people and families across Ohio who are navigating crisis, poverty, instability, and complex reproductive decisions, including parenting, abortion, and adoption. Our work requires us to understand not just intent, but outcomes - especially the foreseeable harm created by state policy.

I am here today in strong opposition to House Bill 87.

This bill is being framed as a family support measure. It is not. It is a legally risky and ethically dangerous bill that advances a coordinated strategy to establish fetal and embryonic legal rights through non-abortion statutes, while exposing pregnant people to coercion, surveillance, and loss of autonomy. The adoption related provisions in the proposed substitute bill do not mitigate this risk - they intensify it.

Specifically, HB 87 expands the definition of “dependent” in our tax code to include “each child conceived” through pregnancy, IVF, or assisted reproduction. Miscarriages are included, but abortions - broadly defined - are excluded. Most alarming is the amendment allowing a prospective adoptive family to claim a fetus as a dependent before birth, while explicitly barring the pregnant person from doing so. This creates, in statute, a pre-birth legal relationship between the fetus and the adoptive family, while severing the legal and financial connection to the person carrying the pregnancy.

To be clear, this is not how ethical adoption works. Under longstanding Ohio law and universal ethical standards, adoption decisions cannot be finalized until after birth. The pregnant person retains the absolute right to change their mind. HB 87 intentionally undermines this principle by granting legal recognition, tangible benefits, and enforceable expectations to third parties *during pregnancy* - before true consent can exist.

The coercive power of this structure is not hypothetical - it is designed. When a pregnant person knows that an adoptive family has already received state recognition and a financial benefit tied directly to their pregnancy, the pressure to follow through - even if they want to parent - becomes overwhelming.

At JustChoice, we have worked with countless families who considered adoption and later chose to parent. Under HB 87, that deeply personal choice becomes legally fraught, emotionally dangerous, and practically inaccessible - especially for young, low income, and marginalized Ohioans. This bill doesn't support families; it pressures them into irreversible decisions.

Furthermore, by granting person-like legal status to embryos and fetuses in non-abortion statutes, HB 87 opens the door to the criminalization of pregnancy outcomes. It creates conditions for surveillance, investigation, and punishment related to miscarriage, stillbirth, substance use, or pregnancy complications - even without explicit criminal penalties. Fear of legal scrutiny will drive pregnant people away from prenatal care and vital support services.

If this legislature genuinely wanted to support families, you would advance evidence-based policies including:

- A meaningful child tax credit, like the \$1,000 credit proposed by Governor DeWine and excluded from last year's budget;
- Legislation to reduce childcare costs;
- Expanded access to affordable housing and healthcare, including mental health;
- Allowing diapers and necessities to be covered by WIC;
- Direct investment in keeping families together.

HB 87 does none of these things. Instead, it uses symbolic tax language to quietly advance fetal personhood, undermine reproductive autonomy, and mess with already fraught adoption law.

This bill does not help families. It harms pregnant people, undermines consent, destabilizes adoptions, and threatens the well-being of children. It is part of a broader strategy to erode rights under the guise of support.

I urge you to see HB 87 for what it is, listen to the Ohioans who will bear its consequences, and stand on the side of ethics, autonomy, and true family support by opposing HB 87.

Thank you.