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Testimony before the Ohio House Committee 3.10.15 on the Heartbeat Bill

Summary: I am a practicing, board-certified Ob-Gyn and support H.B. 69 because it's a common sense Bill consistent with modern science. Physicians and health care systems today universally utilize the presence of a fetal heartbeat to determine viability.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I'm a board-certified Ob-Gyn, currently practicing in Sidney, Ohio. I completed my residency 6 years ago and have been practicing since that time.

You will hear powerful statements from numerous others today reminding us how precious is each human life. Indeed, our Constitution was written and signed by men who dedicated their lives and sacrificed tremendously striving to establish a country in which every human life was protected by law.

My purpose today is to provide you with an up-to-date summary of our medical knowledge of the beginnings of human life. Ever advancing technology and scientific data brings us much more certainty now than what was known and provided to the justices who deliberated over the Roe v Wade decision.

Specifically relevant to this Bill is the fact of when we can document fetal heartbeat and what implications this carries regarding the certainty of a "viable" human life within the mother's womb. While the argument regarding "when human life begins" will always involve philosophy, modern science provides empirical evidence relevant to defining when physicians and patients can recognize human life.

I support H.B. 69 because it protects human life from the time when it can be recognized by empirical medical science. Our patients, mothers and fathers, rely upon the presence of heartbeat to be assured of their living child within the womb. They frequently begin sharing the news of the pregnancy, announcing the expected child, from the time of their initial ultrasound - or certainly as soon as they complete the first trimester - because of the high degree of certainty that this child will continue to live and grow within the mother and be a visible part of their family within just a matter of months.

Statistics, which physicians provide to our patients, assure confidence greater than 90% (up to 98%) that the child will continue to grow and "be viable" (i.e. live and be healthy), once a fetal heartbeat has been visualized by ultrasound or audibly detected by Doppler. At no point in pregnancy will we have 100% assurance of how long the child will live within the womb - just as we never have 100% assurance how long we will live once born. Rare, tragic deaths strike even as late as the final weeks of pregnancy, or during the labor and delivery process. Arguing to delay until

some theoretical point in pregnancy when 100% assurance can be achieved is not medically sound; no such point in pregnancy exists.

During my care for pregnant patients, detection of fetal heartbeat, and assessment of the mother's health are my foremost responsibilities. At every office visit or encounter in the hospital, I both assess the health of the mother and document the fetal heartbeat.

Fetal heartbeat is easy for us to detect – especially beginning in the 2nd trimester. We have 2 reliable, non-invasive techniques that we use daily – ultrasound – with which we can both see and hear the heartbeat, and Doppler with which we only hear the heartbeat. In most cases, ultrasound is required to detect the fetal heartbeat reliably prior to 12 weeks. After 12 weeks, the fetal heartbeat is readily detected by Doppler, and can be confidently distinguished from the mother's heartbeat. In the rare case that I have any doubt as to whether what I am hearing is maternal, rather than fetal heartbeat, I can utilize external ultrasound, which, again, is completely non-invasive and painless, to confirm and distinguish fetal from maternal heartbeat. It is my daily responsibility to do so.

I support this Bill which helps protect the lives of tiny human beings who possess up to a 98% chance to survive, if only their mother chooses to protect and nourish them within her womb as she most certainly would choose to do once she's holding them in her arms. We now have empirical evidence and statistics to support the recognition of human life from the time at which fetal heartbeat can be detected.

Thank you for your time and attention.