

Chairman Derrickson, Vice Chairman Ginter, Ranking Member Howse and Members of the Ohio House Community and Family Advancement Committee, —

Allow me to begin by saying what a privilege it is to speak before this esteemed body. Your constituents have bestowed upon you the distinct honor of representing their interests. As such, you have been entrusted with their full faith and confidence. It is both an honor and a pleasure to address this Chamber, and I thank you for the opportunity.

In brief, I am a 25-year-old resident of Columbiana County preparing to enter law school, where I intend to specialize in healthcare. More importantly, I am a concerned citizen who recognizes the gravity of the issue before this body.

Abortion is one of the most emotionally-charged social issues of our time. The Pro-Life and Pro-Choice movements have long been entrenched in a campaign of political attrition. Each side has their own rhetoric, facts and opinions, and believe that the evidence presented proves their position to be the most righteous. It is not my intent to diminish the significance of any person's position on this issue, regardless of political affiliation. Rather, I hope to share with you my personal beliefs on this matter and in doing so, convince you to enthusiastically support this legislation.

All living beings have a beating heart. Once that heartbeat is extinguished, whether naturally or otherwise, life no longer exists. If life is contingent on a beating heart, then does not the beating heart of an unborn child safely within a mother's womb qualify as proof of life?

We see the importance of the human heartbeat reflected in our own public health and legal institutions. At every stage of human development, the beating heart is observed. A doctor conducts a test to determine if an unborn child has a viable heartbeat. He listens to your heart when you go in for a checkup. It is the last thing the physician checks when he or she announces the time of death after a patient succumbs.

Our legal system is designed to safeguard human life. Ideally, should a life be taken in any unlawful manner, the system ensures that justice prevails. In essence, human life is given legal protection from harm. If we accept that a heartbeat of an unborn child is proof of life, then by virtue of this acceptance, that child deserves the same legal protections afforded to you and me.

The sanctity of human life is a fundamental principle upon which our nation was established. Our Founding Fathers endeavored to protect and secure those unalienable rights of "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." These rights, in particular the right to life, are found, not in government law, but in Nature's law. Depriving any person of this natural right to life deviates from the very truths our Forefathers saw as self-evident.

The sanctity of human life should not be politicized, but rather, embraced by all as a fundamental right of all human beings. Abortion is not solely a political issue; it is a human rights issue that affects each of us, regardless of our personal politics. If we deny that a heartbeat proves the existence of life, and subsequently fail to extend legal protection to safeguard the unborn after their first heartbeat, then we deny our own humanity.

A primary purpose of government is to provide for the health and well-being of its citizens. Therefore, it is the absolute duty of the State to safeguard the lives of its future generations. Those in power have the responsibility to defend the unborn, whose lives begin with their first heartbeat.

Members of the House, your vote will resonate far beyond the confines of this Chamber and will impact the lives of millions yet to be born. I wholeheartedly support this legislation as the ultimate line of defense for the rights of the unborn. These lives are sacred and must be protected, from the first heartbeat to the last.

At the end of the day, we are not Republicans or Democrats, Conservatives or Liberals, but human beings. This reality is oftentimes overshadowed by partisan politics. The value of human life is of such magnitude that we cannot allow the issues that divide us to prevent us from doing what we know in our hearts to be morally right. By passing this legislation, we can lay the foundation for a greater future for our State, where the lives of those born and those yet to be born are cherished and protected. Let us begin that future today.

Thank you, God Bless you, and God Bless our Great State.

Gary Whitla