

## H.B. 69 Rev. Lance L. Curtis M.A., LPC-CR

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Good Afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Lance Curtis. I am pleased to be testifying today in favor of H.B.69. I am a Licensed Professional Counselor and Clinical Resident at Gentle Shepherd Counseling Center. I am also an ordained minister with the Church of God. I have been ordained since 1988. I graduated from the University of Cincinnati with a B.A. in Psychology. I hold a M.A. in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Ashland Theological Seminary and am licensed with the state of Ohio. In my career I have served in the juvenile justice system, foster care system, chemical dependency counseling, case management and personnel coordinator working with developmentally disabled children, restaurant manager, community coordinator, adjunct instructor, and overarching all these roles, I served in a Pastoral capacity in the communities where I resided. These include Canton, Alliance, Columbus, and Wichita. The various roles in which I served enabled me to interact with people from diverse backgrounds and experiences in both a professional and personal capacity.

The point of my testimony today is to support H.B.69 also known as the "Heartbeat Bill". I believe the adoption of this bill will save lives of both children and women. My first point today involves changing the narrative from one about rights to what the issue is truly about and that is LIFE, not only the life of the unborn but the women who are carrying them. Let's begin with an examination of the definition of "RIGHTS". Webster's online dictionary defines rights as the legal, social, or ethical principles of freedom or entitlement; that is, rights are the fundamental normative rules about what is allowed of people or owed to people, according to some legal system, social convention, or ethical theory. The key portion of this definition is the focus on "what is allowed" or "what is owed". Rights are conditional on the interpretation of and application of rules, morals, mores, and folkways; as well as, the immediate concerns of social, cultural, and political systems. Throughout history rights have been given and taken away. This has been done in every society throughout history to one degree or another. In America all we have to do is look back at history e.g. slavery, woman's suffrage, Jim Crow, to see how rights alter with time, history, political, and public sentiment.

Now let's look at the definition of "LIFE" It is defined as the condition that distinguishes animals and plants from inorganic matter, including the capacity for growth, reproduction, functional activity, and continual change preceding death. The existence of an individual human being or animal, Life is the quality that distinguishes a vital and functional being from a dead body. It is a principle force that is considered to underlie the distinctive quality of animate beings. Life is the organismic state characterized by the capacity for metabolism, growth, reaction to stimuli, and reproduction. And although religions differ as to when life begins once it is established Life is viewed as precious.

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I propose that H.B.69 protects life in a reasoned and logical way. The members of the medical, religious, and academic communities differ as to when life begins. Some point to conception and others viability and still others when actual birth occurs. H.B.69 establishes a clear and logical benchmark that the detection of the fetal heartbeat establishes the point where the life of an unborn human individual cannot be legally terminated (with some exceptions). This is a major step in declaring the value of all life.

Not to be lost in the discussion of life is the life of the mother. Abortion impacts the lives of both the unborn human being and the woman choosing to abort her child. In researching this issue I discovered that after 15 weeks the medical risks for abortion become significantly higher. The fetal heartbeat can often be determined by the 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy. This means H.B.69 will help save women from complications and death associated with abortions after 15 weeks. Please note that last year Lakesha Wilson, a young African-American woman, died following an abortion procedure that was late term. Some will argue that the incidents of death are small and insignificant compared to the number that might be if abortions were not legal. My point is that all life is precious and one death is one death too many.

The other side of the damage to life is the emotional consequences on the woman who has chosen to abort her unborn child. As a clinician and reverend I have seen firsthand the emotional consequences of abortion. The severity can vary but depression, guilt, shame, grief, and anxiety. Post-traumatic stress is also often present. These issues impact not only the mothers but also those with who they are in relationship.

I am sure you have heard the statistics and data on both sides of the argument related to H.B.69. In the midst of all the data, research the fact that at the core of H.B.69 is life can be lost. That leads to my second point; which is found in what historically has been the most effective and powerful tool when "life" is at issue, the simple presentation of story. I will now address the issue from the perspective of story, my story and that of a few others.

The year is 1962 before Roe v.Wade but not before abortion. A young white woman finds herself pregnant. The father is a "negro" in a time when interracial relationships were taboo at best and dangerous at worst. This young woman chose to carry the child to term. Then once delivered she chose to place the child up for adoption. A teacher and a factory worker had been trying for years to have a child to no avail would be introduced to this bi-racial baby for the first time. It was at that moment that they knew he was to be their son. The couple adopted me and I was raised in a family system full of love. My mother told me that I was adopted early in my life. I was 6 or 7 when she first disclosed the fact to me. She told me the story of the young white woman who took me away prior to the finalization of the adoption. She had me for a long time. My mom told me she became concerned as time progressed. The young woman returned in tears. She handed me to the social worker and left. In a time when it would have

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been easier to find a way to out she carried me and gave me the chance to live outside the safety of her womb in a family that loved me.

Ten years later Roe V. Wade was decided and abortion became legal and easily accessible. I often wonder if her choice would have been different. Perhaps I might not have been given the opportunity to be. I would have never married the love of my life nor had two wonderful sons. My adoptive family would not have known the joy of having me in their lives to love and rear. I would have not touched lives through ministry and counseling.

Flashing forward to my college years I met a young lady who would become like a sister to me. As we entered our senior year, I noticed a marked change in her. She smiled less and became more withdrawn. A dark cloud seemed to be over her and it became increasingly obvious that something was seriously wrong. One day we were talking and she became unable to speak. Tears began to flow from her eyes and she was inconsolable. After about an hour or more of this she gathered herself together and disclosed that over the summer she had an abortion. The child was a product of her long term off and on relationship with a boyfriend and fellow student. I encouraged her to seek counseling and pastoral care. As a result of her journey and as a part of her grieving process she named her aborted child Faith and had a funeral service for her. In the end it was not about her right to an abortion nor the exercising of that right. It was about a life.

The final part of my story that I want to share during this testimony involves my involvement working with developmentally disabled children in Wichita at Heartspring. Many of these children were severely disabled. They were the children that made you wonder if they would have been better off not being born. The type of children that are identified in the womb and then abortion is presented as an option. I worked with these children and those who worked with them for 2 1/2 years. During that time I saw the joy they brought others and the smiles on their faces as they lived. My perceptions and narratives changed. I recognized that I do not have the right to determine the quality or usefulness of a life. I also learned to appreciate the beauty found in uncommon packages.

I also want to relay a story of a young African American man who was a product of incest. His mother was a minor. She chose to carry the life growing within her and then give him up for adoption. Today that young man has completed his undergrad degree and is preparing to enter grad school. He works full time at a corporation. He is a coach and mentors children and teenagers. This past year he was honored by those students as they requested him to specifically continue to coach them. This is a life that not only was given a chance in less than optimal conditions but also that is impacting the lives of others.

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It is easy to look at a woman early in pregnancy and not recognize the importance and potential of the life that is growing in her. To see only through the lens of preconceived ideas and notions that lead to evaluations of the significance or worth of the unborn human life. This determination is bathed in prejudice that would say the mother is too young, too poor, too busy, too old, the wrong color, or the unborn human potentially is too sick, or potentially too disabled, the potential for abuse or neglect is too great. My question is how many lives well lived would have never been given the chance if these criteria were applied in determining should they be carried to term. These are determinations that are way above our pay grade for we are finite.

H.B.69 is a giant step forward and should be passed for the issue is not one of rights but one of life. All life is precious including unborn human life.

I thank you for this opportunity and pray God's guidance and strength be with you.