

Anne Chasser
Opponent Testimony, Senate Bill 164
Before Senate Committee on Health, Human Services and Medicaid
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Chairman Burke, Vice Chairman Beagle, Ranking Member Tavares, and members of the Ohio Senate Committee on Health, Human Services and Medicaid.

My name is Anne Chasser, I live in Cincinnati, I am the sister of Christopher, who has Down syndrome and I am here to testify in opposition to Senate Bill 164.

My family moved to Ohio from Buffalo, NY, in 1970 when Christopher was 3 years old. He is now 50 years old. This past summer our family had a big reunion at Lake Erie to celebrate his birthday and celebrate how Christopher has enriched our lives.

To provide some background, I graduated from the University of Dayton and worked at Ohio State University for 23 years where I established the Trademark Licensing Program. Ohio State was one of the first universities in the country to register its trademarks. Today, Ohio State is one of the top trademark licensing schools in the country and historically has been viewed and regarded as a leader in the collegiate trademark licensing industry.

In 1999, I was confirmed by the U.S. Senate to serve as the Commissioner of Trademarks in the US Patent and Trademark Office in Washington, D.C. I served a 5-year term under Presidents Clinton and Bush. In 2005, I joined the University of Cincinnati as Associate Vice President of Intellectual Property. In 2012, I retired after 37 years of public service.

I am here today because I believe that a pregnant woman must have the right to choose what is best for her and her family. This decision should not be made by the government.

When my brother was born, doctors recommended to my parents that Christopher be placed in an institution. My parents brought Chris home instead, and he became the centerpiece of our family. He was 10 years younger than the youngest of 5 other siblings.

Christopher lived with my parents until he was 29 years old then moved into a group home. My mother passed away one year later and my father passed away four years later. Our family is very grateful that Chris has a home where he is happy and well cared for.

My main concern about this legislation is the impact it would have on women – especially women who do not have the capacity, ability, family support, community network, or other resources to provide a productive, happy life for a child with

Down syndrome. It is the mother who likely will have the primary responsibility to provide for the child. The mother, in consultation with her doctor, needs to make the choice of having the baby or not. Even in my family, which had financial and other means, it was often difficult to navigate the complexities of the state bureaucracy and non-profit agencies that assist those with Down syndrome and other disabilities.

If the mother does not have access to the necessary services, who will care for her child?

I lived at home until I went to college. I was very close to my parents while they were alive, and I saw what they went through to help Chris, providing opportunities for him; finding doctors, schools, social activities and working tirelessly to ensure that he lived as full a life as possible. Our family had the resources to do this. My father dedicated his post-retirement life to working with state and local agencies to help provide resources and services for Down syndrome children and adults and others with disabilities in Ohio.

If this bill is passed, I ask you: are you prepared to adequately fund services to help Down syndrome babies who are born to mothers who do not have the resources or the family means to help support these babies? Are you willing to provide resource counseling for the families with Down syndrome children, funding for costly infant simulation and early childhood education programs; physical, occupational and speech therapy; job training and group homes and additional support services after the parents and primary caretakers are gone?

As you study this bill, you need to see first-hand the challenges that families confront with the birth of a Down syndrome baby. I strongly urge each member of this committee to spend one day with such a family. Get to know them, listen to them and ask yourself if you still believe that this type of government intrusion is warranted and necessary. I know from my family's experience that it is not.

My brother, Chris, was a blessing to our family. I am proud to say that my family was resourceful and Chris continues to be well cared for.

My daughter knows and loves Chris, too, but she also knows that if she found out that she was carrying a baby with Down's syndrome, I would 100% support her choice — to terminate the pregnancy or chose to have the baby.

The choice should be with the mother, her doctor, and her family – not the government.

I am happy to answer any questions.