

*Melissa Ohden
MSW, Founder of The Abortion Survivors Network*

Testimony for Ohio Senate Health and Human Service and Medicaid Committee

Re: Senate Bill 23

March 6, 2019

Thank you so much for your time today, Senators. I appreciate your attention to Senate Bill 23 and although I couldn't be present in person today, I hope that as you hear my testimony, you understand the importance in you supporting it.

"The heart's beating at a rate of 140. The child is moving serenely in the uterus. The mouth is receiving the thumb of the child...the abortionist has now dilated the cervix and is now inserting the suction tip. As the suction tip moves toward the child, the child will rear away from it...We see the child's mouth wide open in a silent scream. Now the heart has perceptibly speeded up to about 200 beats a minute; there is no question that the child senses the most mortal danger imaginable," Dr. Bernard Nathanson, former abortionist, narrated in *The Silent Scream*, an ultrasound video of a 12-week abortion.

I know that's incredibly difficult to read or hear. Abortion is an incredibly difficult procedure to face. But face it, we must.

Today, I'm going to share with you parts of my life story that have been horribly difficult for me and for members of both my biological and adoptive family to face, but face it, we must, and gratefully, we've come out on the side of life, forgiveness and healing.

Fetal development indicates that a child's heart begins beating at approximately 18 days after conception. By the time that my nineteen-year-old, biological mother's saline infusion abortion was forced upon her by her mother, I was likely around 31 weeks gestational age. My heart had been beating for approximately 217 days.

As the toxic salt solution of the saline infusion abortion was injected into the amniotic fluid surrounding me in the womb, attempting to scald and poison me to death, from the outside in, I wonder how fast my heart began to beat. Did my serene heartbeat, like the baby Dr. Nathanson showed in *The Silent Scream*, sense the danger that was thrust upon me?

I can only imagine how fast my heart beat over the course of the five days that I soaked in that toxic salt solution, which was even two days longer than the standard of the procedure, as indicated in my medical records, as they tried time and time again to induce my birthmother's labor with me.

I can only imagine how rapid my heart beat was when I was finally expelled from the womb on the fifth day of the abortion, once my biological mother's premature labor was finally successfully induced that day in August of 1977. My arrival into this world was not so much as a birth, but an accident, a "live birth" after a saline infusion abortion. My medical records from St. Luke's Hospital actually state, "a saline infusion for an abortion was done, but was unsuccessful." They also list out a complication of my birthmother's pregnancy as a saline infusion.

My apgar score when I was first delivered alive was a 6, which, for a child like me being born in an abortion procedure, wasn't good, but certainly was better than expected. However, within five minutes, during which there were demands made to leave me to die by my own grandmother, who was actually a prominent nurse in the Sioux City community, who oversaw many of the nurses working at the hospital, and whose working relationship with the abortionist, Dr. Kelberg, led to the secretly forced abortion taking place on my birthmother, dipped down to a 2. I was in critical condition.

I can only imagine how slow my heart rate dipped when I was "laid aside" that day, in the words of the nurse who I've now been connected with and who was brave enough to share those details of my life story with me, as the arguments about my life and whether I would be provided medical care or simply left to die like my grandmother instructed them to do, ensued.

I can only imagine how slow my heart rate was when a nurse courageously rushed me off to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, shouting out, "she just kept gasping for breath, and so I couldn't just leave her there to die!"

I can only imagine how my heart beat began to pick up again after medical care was provided to me. It must have taken quite a while to beat at a normal pace, though, as my medical records reflect that the doctors initially suspected I had a fatal heart defect due to the distress I presented with. I suffered from severe respiratory problems, jaundice, and seizures. I weighed in at 2 pounds, 14 ounces, which is what led a neonatologist to remark in my medical records that I was approximately 31 weeks gestation, as opposed to the 18-20 weeks that the abortionist had indicated.

My heart beat grew steadier and stronger by the day, not simply because of the medical care that I received at both St. Luke's Hospital and The University of Iowa Hospitals, where I was transferred after 21 days of stabilization, but because of the love that I received.

I've been blessed to be connected with a number of nurses and even a volunteer who held me, gave me a name when I was left nameless for two months in the hospital, who prayed over me, and even knitted me clothing and baby booties, that I still have in my possession today. I was even more blessed to be loved unconditionally and wholeheartedly by my adoptive parents who were not deterred by the doctors' prognoses that I would likely suffer from multiple disabilities.

My life has been a set of many miracles, which includes being the mother of two daughters, Olivia and Ava, ages 10 and 4, respectively, and now even being united with my biological mother and many members of her family and my biological father's. We live our lives knowing that we're blessed to be connected, to love one another, and to use the suffering that we've experienced to make a difference for others.

I have lived every day since I found out about the truth of my survival at the age of 14, knowing that I'm one of the lucky ones. I have lived every day since discovering that truth about my life knowing that sadly, children just like me aren't given the opportunity to live, and they aren't given the opportunity to be loved.

I now work with abortion survivors around the world. I've had contact with 279 survivors or their friends and family who have communicated on their behalf. Those survivors range in age from infants to individuals in their 60's and 70's who survived illegal abortions. Many have survived chemical abortions, while others have survived surgical abortions like the saline infusion.

As a fellow American, as a fellow human being, I deserved the same right to life, the same equal protection under the law as each and every one of you, as did the survivors that I work with.

I was not a "woman's right to choose," I was a child. And ironically, without the right to life first and foremost, as a woman, I never would have had any other right.

I had a beating heart that was meant to be stopped by abortion, and it almost succeeded.

My heart races with joy over the life that I've been given, but it breaks with the reality of what is happening to children like me every single day in our country. My heart pounds with courage to no longer be afraid of who I am or what was done to me, and I can think of no greater legacy to leave for my daughters and the rest of the world--to stand up, speak out, and do what's right, no matter the circumstance or situation.

What about you? What's the legacy you're going to leave for your family, your constituency, your state? As you consider your support of this bill, I urge you to think about not just me and the thousands upon thousands of Ohio children like me who have been unprotected from abortion, but so, too, the lives of children like my daughters, who never would have lived if the abortion would have succeeded in ending my life.

Who in this room would like to look my daughters in the eye and tell them that their mother's life was not worth defending? Just as my heart beat in my biological mother's womb, their hearts beat in mine. Their hearts, my heart, my adoptive mother's heart, and my biological mother's hearts all beat as one, connected.

Your vote on this bill will send a very clear message to my daughters, to me, to my two mothers, to all of the children in your state, about what you believe about the importance of life.

Ohio has a rich heritage in taking a stand for what is right and true, and in setting an example for other states to follow. The nation, and literally the world, is watching you right now to see what you will do here in Ohio. Will your vote on this bill leave a legacy that you can hold your head high about and be proud to share with the world? I hope and pray that you have the strength and courage to vote in support of this bill and ensure that lives like mine have the protection that inherently deserve, from the moment that a fetal heartbeat can be detected. I look forward to sharing with my daughters how Senators in Ohio acknowledged and showed respect for our lives by their vote on this bill.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Melissa Ohden