

Written Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 123, Joel M. Schutte, 2021.10.25

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 123, the Human Life Protection Act. As an adopted child, I have been contemplating the sanctity of human life since 1984...at that time I was 6 years old. That year the realization hit me that the family I was raised in was not my family of birth. It would be more than ten years later that I learned that the *Roe v. Wade* legislation could have authorized a physician to end my life in the womb. From my early days in the first grade, I learned that something called adoption took me out of one family and put me into another. Years later I found out that the disruption I had known as adoption was an alternative to abortion.

There were other things that I remember being deeply ingrained in me as a child. I couldn't stand bullies. Especially bullies that picked on students with disabilities. My friend Nathan was always the butt of school yard jokes, and sometimes kids would corner him where the playground monitor could not see or hear their attacks. I stood up for Nathan...not because I didn't care about the acceptance of my peers...I wanted to fit in too. I stood up for Nathan because his life met more to me than my schoolmates' approval. Before I finished the first grade, I learned the lesson that fitting in with the popular opinions of others was not worth the cost of a human life.

Years later, in 1997, while serving as a staff member at a juvenile drug and alcohol rehab center, I learned a different lesson. Just because a human being is struggling with addiction, mental health issues, or trauma that they self-medicate with drugs or alcohol, they are people created in the image of the divine. This is where I learned the lesson "...that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." (Declaration of Independence)

I learned the most important lesson in 2007 as my wife and I participated in the training necessary to become licensed foster parents. It was here that we established relationships with

friends, case workers, and judges, to wrestle with the most important question of our careers: “What would I be willing to do to stabilize and create pathways of success for children and families in the state of Ohio?” For my wife and I, the answer included opening our home to nineteen foster children from 2008-2016, and eventually saying yes to Judge David Woessner’s request that we provide a forever home for five of those nineteen children. We did this because every child is worth fighting for!

In 2019, the Missouri legislature released the identities of both of my biological parents. Later that year, I discovered that I am one of eleven brothers and sisters on my dad’s side. I found out that the five oldest of us all have different mothers. I heard that my extended family had put undue pressure on our mothers to abort us. One of my sibling’s mothers was taken out of state to a clinic in New York to receive an abortion. She pleaded with our father to change his mind and he eventually relented, otherwise there would have been ten of us instead of eleven.

I still defend people against bullies on the “playground” of life. I wrestle against unjust systems that relegate value and worth to a human being based on their age, race, socioeconomic status, neighborhood, or gender. I stand up for people, bound in unjust systems that leave them with no voice, and for those whose voices cannot be heard from the womb, or through the turmoil of today’s political landscape. I stand against systems that support disproportionate amounts of abortions occurring in impoverished neighborhoods, with especially high rates of abortion in minority communities. I support all families choosing life for their child, whether they can afford to raise their son or daughter or not. I support adoption in all forms, including public and private adoptions in the state of Ohio. Our faith community supports initiatives that encourage the success and happiness of children, youth, adults, and senior adults, believing that life is not only precious before one can draw breath on their own, but from the moment one is conceived until the day one draws breath for the last time.

A few years ago, I came across a quote from Sister Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun. She said, "I do not believe that just because you are opposed to abortion, that that makes you pro-life" ... I agree with her. (<https://www.ncronline.org/news/politics/sr-joan-chittisters-2004-quote-pro-life-versus-pro-birth-goes-viral>) I believe that to call oneself pro-life, one should put their time, energy, resources, and comfort, on the line to make a difference in someone's life. The first person in my family to do this was my biological mother. In 1976 she left her family, dropped out of her semester in college, and traveled to Missouri to have a child she has never met; she believed that all children are worth fighting for. My request for those of you listening to my testimony today is that you would fight for all the rest of us whose voices have not yet been heard, and vote in support of Senate Bill 123.

Thank you for your consideration and I can answer questions from the committee at this time.