Larry & Jackie Keough
Proponent Testimony/HB 214
House Health Committee
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Introduction – Good morning Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Antonio and Committee members. My name is Larry Keough. I usually testify before legislative committees as an advocate on behalf of Catholic schools and students. But today I, my wife, Jackie and two daughters, Mary Kate and Sara Beth, are here in support of HB 214.

We believe our story about the birth of Mary Kate in 1995 and the subsequent birth of Sara Beth in 1997 is a testament why HB 214 should become law.

Our story – Mary Kate is our fourth child out of five. As Jackie was holding Mary shortly after the birth, our doctor had her removed from Jackie's arms and whisked her away. The doctor later explained that Mary had traits – webbing of feet, low muscle tone and facial features associated with Down Syndrome – and did not want us to become attached to Mary until we had an opportunity to hear about the challenges of raising her.

Jackie will explain what transpired: We were told we could and probably should institutionalize her and that she would be a drain on our family. They left out the extras that Mary would bring joy, laughter and celebration for the little accomplishments that are often taken for granted.

People sometimes ask, "What do you want for Mary Kate?" As her mom, I want what I wish for all five of our children. We want her to believe in God, be a good and moral person, be a giver, feel validated, and make a difference in this world. The world is a better place for her presence here and we all deserve some extras in life.

Mary, like so many other children with Down Syndrome, wants to be loved and love unconditionally.

Today, Mary is 21 years-old and has a job at Bishop Ready Catholic High School in Columbus. She is a "greeter," helps shed papers and assists the school's guidance counselors.

Some may ask what about those parents who are overwhelmed by the prospect of having a child with Down Syndrome. They need to be told about the extras – not just focusing on the disabilities, but the abilities too. They need to know that people with Down Syndrome have challenges and their paths through life may be a little different. They need to know all children have varying challenges and none is immune from maladies, disease, disorders and addictions within the trials and tribulations of life.

I founded a chapter of a Down Syndrome Association to tell parents that there is no perfect baby or human being. We wanted them to know the rest of the story – raising a special child is a blessing, not a curse, and through early intervention and support of developmental services and other advocacy organizations, they too can enjoy the extras.

It is also instructive for all of us as members of society to be aware that we live among a diverse population and are better for it. Getting to know people with Down Syndrome teaches us that they have gifts too and the world is a better place with them in our lives.

An example of this was when Mary was a senior in high school. Her fellow students voted her prom queen. We believe her classmates wanted to validate her for the unconditional love she bestowed upon each of them throughout high school.

As the U.S. Catholic Bishops stated in their pastoral statement about People with Disabilities, “We tend to automatically think of doing something for people with disabilities. We do not reflect that they can do something for us and with us. People with disabilities can, by their example, teach the non-disabled person much about strength and Christian acceptance.”

Sara’s birth – When Mary was 2, I was pregnant with our youngest daughter, Sara. Due to Mary born with Down Syndrome and my age at that time, 38, I was exhorted to undergo amniocentesis. When I refused to do so, there were threats we would lose our health insurance.

I did, however, agree to an alpha fetal protein test that indicated there was a 1 in 26 chance of Sara being born with a severe disability. What was not disclosed at that time is an alpha fetal protein test is highly unreliable.

We were strongly encouraged to consider abortion as an option.

We never did. Sara was born a healthy baby. She is now 19 years old, a student at OSU with aspirations to be a nurse.

We ask ourselves – how many unborn children have been aborted for fear that the baby would have a disability and that the disability would present challenges that are perceived to be insurmountable?

We ask that each of you to support HB 214 that would stop the genocidal practice of aborting unborn children with Down Syndrome. By doing so, this can be a critical step to eliminate abortion based on individual genetic make up.

Thank you.

At this time, we would be pleased to answer any questions.