

**Judith Harness RN, MS, FCP**

**Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 23**

**Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee**

**Tuesday, February 19, 2019**

Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today on Senate Bill 23. My name is Judy Harness. I am a registered nurse of 34 years graduating twice from THE Ohio State University earning both a bachelors and masters degree in nursing. Most of my work experience has been in maternal /newborn healthcare both as a clinician and as adjunct faculty for 2 Ohio colleges providing both classroom and clinical nursing instruction in the area of maternity nursing. I have worked in the maternity health field in 3 states most recently in Chillicothe Ohio, my hometown. But currently I serve as the Family Life Coordinator for my parish St. Peters where, among other things, I teach a fertility awareness based method of natural family planning known as The Creighton Model Method. I instruct client couples primarily in the Southeastern Ohio region how to understand and respect their fertility. I am also the President for the Ross County Ohio Right to Life.

I could certainly talk this morning about the scientific evidence of why detection of a heartbeat has relevance in the legal realm of discussion, but I am sure you already have medical professionals with much more knowledge than I to do that. I also could talk about the countless expressions of joy that I personally have witnessed when a mother or a couple hears or sees the beating heart of their child in the womb. But that seems only obvious since I am sure all of us have known someone at sometime that has had that experience. I considered telling you the story of my daughter who after seeing the ultrasound of her daughter made the hard but right decision to carry and birth her daughter, though she was a single parent with minimal resources at the time of that decision--all because she saw a heartbeat on an ultrasound at a pregnancy resource center.

Instead, I have decided to speak from my heart, the heart that God chose for me, about His heart. Today in our church's readings we hear in Genesis that "God's heart was grieved". His heart was grieved because as the story goes on, he was grieved and regretted that he had made man on the earth. God's heart was grieved. His heart was grieved because of man's inhumanity to man. His heart being so grieved, he responded by sending the great flood to destroy all he had created with the exception of one righteous man, his family and of course, one male and one female animal of every species for reproduction after the great flood. His heart was broken, but in his merciful heart, he had to believe that the goodness of man was still possible.

The human heart I think can tell us a lot about God because he put our hearts in the center of the body, the one organ that feeds the entire body. The sound of a heart beating is a sound of life! When someone codes, we try desperately to resuscitate the victim and find relief when we hear the sound of the heart resume its beating. We know the immediate danger facing a preborn baby when we are able to detect deceleration of fetal heart tones. We spring into immediate action and we work to relieve the source of the stress on that baby and all personnel and the pregnant mom and usually the dad by her side, all listen with frantic hope that they will continue to hear that baby's heartbeat. The sound of the heart beat is consoling. We all know the peace we find when our ears are pressed against the chest of the one we love, listening to the sound of their heart beating. That's why it is rightfully referred to in medicine as a "vital sign".

Though there are 2 main vital organs, the brain and the heart. Brain activity does not bring us joy. It is only the heart that gives us that wonderful experience of love. It is the heart that literally experiences pain in times of loss. It is the heart that leaps in times of great excitement like football Saturdays when The Buckeyes pull out another great win over Michigan! There is something special about the human heart, not explainable by science. It has a supernatural significance. That's why I suppose, this legislation is so important. We talk about abortion in terms of science, is it ok when the "cells" are this developed or not? But the conversation is different when we are talking about the sound of a heart. That's because we all know, regardless of our medical knowledge, that a heart beating is more than a medical sign. It is a reminder that we are someone. A person. And a group of persons is referred to as PEOPLE. This country was founded under the belief that we are not a bunch of individuals making up the masses--that is communism. We are persons together, and we have been granted the right to live by our God who created us, who designed that human heart and taught it to beat. And together our founders scripted the words that begin our Constitution, "We The People", recognizing the unique and divine nature of each and every human person, which we could say, is the heart of our country. There are no coincidences and it is not one now that today in this Ohio Legislature, you have the decision to recognize the immense importance of the sound of a human heart, and that we tote that our state, the great State of Ohio IS "The Heart of it ALL!"

Let's get this one right, or we once again will certainly grieve the heart of our Creator. Let's vote to pass SB 23 to protect the hearts of our future, the hearts of our countrymen, the heart of America.

Thank you for allowing me to come and share my thoughts today.