

To the Vermont legislative body,

We are fast approaching a very dangerous moral decision in our state that is a rush to judgement without thorough investigation. It is a tipping point that once crossed is terribly difficult to undo. The unforeseen ramifications of this decision can be horrific. I say this because by denying life to some and leaving an ambiguous void for when life begins, it leaves us all in peril. As Alexander Pope stated so eloquently, "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." This governing body is recklessly making decisions based in fear and not in known truth.

We as part of western civilization pushed the development of our understanding of life and how to maintain it through hospitals and created a school of medicine. The basis of this development has led us to the fact that each person, rich or poor, young or old, has the right to life. This is what drives our search for successful healthcare for all and a means to heal those in our community struggling with the disease of addiction. What is being proposed is a direct contradiction to the backbone of medicine, to do no harm. This lack of respect for life is responsible for the deaths of over 61 million U.S. children since 1973. Though I would like to see an end to all abortions, that is not why I am writing to you today. I am asking you to consider biological facts and consider and protect the freedom to life for viable fetuses.

There are a number of biological facts that should not be ignored when deciding the rights of the unborn. While I would not consider abortion for myself, in the past I did believe there should be the option for choice. After studying to be a nurse and taking Anatomy and Physiology, my opinion has drastically changed. Fetal hearts begin to beat at twenty days in the womb, with brain waves occurring at 40 days. Birth does not "flip a switch" that makes us suddenly a functioning human. It happens in utero. At 14 weeks after conception the entire body surface, except the back and the top of the head, are sensitive to pain. Imagine the pain this innocent life endures in a second or third trimester abortion. What is more, an unborn child can survive outside of the womb at 21 weeks. This is a very personal point for me. A dear friend of mine was born at 21 weeks. She has not only survived but thrives into her thirties. She has a wonderful sense of humor and is an accomplished musician. I thank God for her every day. I also have a dear friend that chose abortion and she has suffered through the pain of that decision for decades. There are massive psychological and sometimes irreversible physical prices the mother faces for potentially the rest of her life. This law does not take into account the child or the mother. It is devastating in its current form.

In 1940 we created a law to protect eagles and their eggs, a worthwhile endeavor. In a nation where it is illegal to harm eagle eggs, why do we allow for the slaughter of innocent babies? We have no shortage of people waiting to adopt unwanted babies. It is estimated there are between one and two million couples waiting to adopt at least one child. Let's take this focus and promote the gift of life for these families and increase assistance for women to procure reliable affordable birth control. I pray that we as members of the state I am proud to call home can find a way to return to our abolitionist roots and defend the rights of life for all instead of the select few. I fear without this clear distinction of when these rights start and denying a fetus independent rights under Vermont law, we are participating in atrocities that could rival the holocaust of World War II. If our laws do not reflect our morals, our society is in a downward spiral none of us will escape. If we do not protect the helpless, who will be next?

Sincerely,
Kelly Astleford
Kacasey6@gmail.com