

Dear Vermont Legislators,

My son Theodore was born when he was 36 weeks and 2 days old. Together, his body and mine, decided that that was the time his life would transition from one lived inside the womb to one lived outside of it. His birth day was not the day that his life began, it was the day it changed from depending upon an umbilical cord for nutrition to depending on breasts, from being swaddled in amniotic fluid to being swaddled in arms, from sleeping on my bladder to sleeping on my chest. Many things changed the day Theo was born, the value of his life was not one of them.

I write today in opposition of House Bill 57, which legislates the legality of killing an unborn child based on the fact that it is still living its life inside the womb.

Regardless of one's convictions about the morality of aborting a baby in earlier trimesters, we must recognize that Vermont's proposed expansion of abortion access up until the moment of birth is not necessary. If a mother wishes to rid herself of pregnancy and/or parenthood at this late stage of the tiny human's fetal development it is most often less invasive and less risky to induce live birth. Many physicians have spoken to this fact.

Speaking as a woman who has experienced pregnancy, I can say that pregnancy clouds your mind and twists your emotions. Pregnancy is hard. My heart aches for those who do not have the support and assistance that I was privileged to have. There are decisions I made while pregnant that I would make differently now, post-childbirth. Luckily, none of them are irreversible. As much as my heart aches for those who do not have the support that I had while pregnant, it aches even more severely for those who make life-changing (for them) and life-ending (for their offspring) decisions that cannot later be reversed. Heightened emotions and increased pain, lessened hours of sleep and lowered energy, these side effects of pregnancy can lead to desperation. Women need compassionate caretakers to empower them through what they, and only they, can do—gestate and deliver new life. Let us not suggest that woman should treat desperation with defeat when so many other options exist.

To imply that the decision to abort is the only choice that is worth having access to making is to limit one's perspective from considering the broad array of alternatives. Pushing for access to abortion does not broaden a woman's rights or choices, it limits her focus to the one that is simplest and most immediately effective for the state. Vermont can do better. You can do better. As a mother, as a citizen, as a woman, I demand better.

Women need support and assistance in nurturing babies—in the womb, in homes, and at daycare centers. With nearly ten active bills and resolutions related to childcare and family leave in Vermont, it is clear that our legislators and citizens recognize the importance of providing an environment that is conducive to cared-for-children and cared-for-families. Why, then, the hypocrisy of H.57 which neither values children nor the families responsible for their care?

Based on a human baby's average gestational period, four more weeks of Theodore's life should have been lived in a status where H.57 deems it acceptable to kill him. Removing the barrier of my abdominal flesh and blood—literally the only things that separated this baby from being deemed human by H.57—revealed just how alive he was

even one month before his predicted birth. To suggest that it is ever acceptable, preferred, necessary, or civil to intentionally extinguish a life at this stage is barbaric.

H.57 does not represent who we are as Vermonters seeking just and humane policies of inclusion that value women, families, the marginalized, and the vulnerable. Please do not support H.57.

In peace,
Stephanie Clary
Essex Junction, VT