

4/19/19: Testimony of Annisa Lamberton, Middletown Springs, VT

You heard testimony from a Brooklyn, New York, resident about choosing to go beyond medically necessary and commonly accepted boundaries for a third-trimester abortion for his child. State law shapes outcomes for families, which is why I ask you to respect Vermont values: self-sacrifice and common sense. With H-57, "You can't get there from here."

There is a beautiful path this family and others like them in Vermont could take when faced with illness.

- He said his child would live for only a few moments and "we couldn't put a baby through that." What did they then "put a baby through"? The child would be given a fatal injection in his heart and removed from the mother piece by piece, which places the mother at risk for uterine and cervical damage.
- He also said his wife had a previous brain injury and would be at risk for a brain bleed if she were unprepared and had to deliver a child through pushing in a vaginal birth instead of a planning a scheduled C-section.
- He also discussed suffering financially by buying an abortion for his 31+ week child.

First, I acknowledge the crisis of emotion and heartbreak that families experience when they learn their child has a health issue. I am here to share with you the story of my family to help you see that, as with any pregnancy, taking each step with patience and a willingness to share the privilege of life is a healing, beautiful journey.

At 22-weeks, an ultrasound showed that one of my twin children had indications of Down syndrome. The doctors rushed me and my husband into genetic counseling and encouraged us to abort and make the choice quickly. They would inject his heart to cause his death. He would then decay inside of me and cause risks of miscarriage and infection for his sister and mother. (In contrast, they would not perform life-saving intrauterine surgery to save him because of risk to our daughter, which indicates the ethos of death over life created by relying on abortion.) We rejected abortion. Within weeks, the doctors found their diagnosis of Down syndrome was wrong.

However, our son did have a life threatening illness. What was the difference here than with earlier testimony from New York? Rather than investing our efforts to buy an abortion, we invested in finding the best doctors for all three of us.

Our son had polyhydramnios, which is excess amniotic fluid. Our daughter had oligohydramnios, which is insufficient amniotic fluid. We found an expert surgeon for our son's condition and were referred to a high risk OBGYN at the adjoining women's hospital. While in their care, we had daily ultrasounds and were able to see our son bounce and turn and roll "for the cameras."

Through 28-33 weeks gestation, we bonded and cared for our child by reading to him and singing and praying and letting his older sister feel him kick; she pick out a teddy bear for him. A relative made him a quilt of stars and moons. His grandmothers saw him on ultrasound. His father and I were able to heal and prepare for his life continuing outside of the womb...for however long.

Our doctors were also able to plan for his birth and following care. On our scheduled delivery day, both our son and daughter had their own team of professionals. A surgical team had prepared to stabilize our son and perform lifesaving surgery. My OBGYN also had a team for my care; she made sure I was able to stroke my son's hair and kiss my daughter before they were rushed to the MICU and NICU.

Our son was not able to have the surgery we had hoped for; however, six-hours after he was born, he was able to have his father's loving arms around him as he peacefully died. We have his hand and foot prints and a lock of his hair. And, he was able to be buried wrapped in his special quilt with the little bear from his sister. Our Vermont community supported us through a beautifully hard season.

It was so beautiful that our birth announcement shared about both our children. Our son became an old Vermonter's namesake: Forrest. Our home holds pictures of three children. Our daughter has pictures of her twin. We chose hope and life for our children and the legacy of that beautiful choice continues.

Our daughter, who was born at 33 weeks, 4 lbs. and 4 oz., and spent only 2 days in the NICU, is now 21 and training to be a NICU nurse like those who served her and her brother. She had her nursing school rotation in the NICU this semester and sent me this picture of a diaper from a 22-week old baby she had cared for that night. She called to say, "Mom, when the nurses found out I was from Vermont, they all said, 'That abortion bill...they are talking about killing our patients.'"

Self-sacrificing and common sense Vermont values; can we get there from here? H-57 is not the way.

"Somewhere ages and ages hence," as Frost wrote, Vermont history will show your vote at this divergent moment "in the wood." The road you take will make all the difference.

Please vote no on H-57.