

Testimony of Cait McNelly in Opposition to House Bill 2253

House Federal and State Affairs Committee, February 20, 2013

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee,

In 1933 my father, then 12 years old, lost his 22 year old sister to an illegal abortion. It was the height of the Depression and her husband had been out of work for months, unable to support her and their two children. When he found out she was pregnant again, he told her to "get rid of it" or he was abandoning the family. She took him at his word and, in an effort to save her family, decided to get an abortion. Given that they were in extreme poverty, she wasn't exactly able to access the best of care and the "clinic", if it could be called that, she went to was a dirty back room with a bloody mattress and unsterile, sharp instruments. She was dead a week later, leaving behind two orphaned children.

In 1962, at the age of 35, my mother found out she was pregnant. She and my father would have welcomed another child, unplanned as it was. There was just one problem. My mother had been prescribed thalidomide as a sleeping pill. She was almost four months pregnant when the news broke of the horrible birth defects the drug was causing when taken early in pregnancy. My mother, frantic and sick with worry, applied for an abortion. She was refused. She was in the process of attempting to find a path to an illegal abortion when fate intervened and, at almost five months, she naturally miscarried. The fetus was grossly deformed, lacking arms, with only half of one leg and with it's spinal cord and half of it's brain outside of it's body. It was a direct result of this experience that my own mother (born in 1926) became a pro- choice advocate.

About a week ago, a woman who was 33 weeks pregnant died in Maryland following a late term abortion. Since then, anti-abortion groups and organizations have exploited her situation unmercifully, completely ignoring her personal dignity and the grief of her family. They have publicized her name, background and the circumstances of her death without regard to her privacy or that of her family.

No one knows the circumstances of why she chose to abort, although we can infer that it must have been something pretty drastic. All indications were that it was a wanted child, as she had set up baby registries and had published names online. But her unknown reasons are being completely

ignored by these groups, despite the fact that it may have been the very presence of the pregnancy, itself, that contributed to her death.

They don't tell you that, according to the National Institutes of Health and the CDC, both agencies of the Federal Government, a woman is **fourteen times** more likely to die from pregnancy than an abortion. Yet just one woman that died hundreds, if not thousands, of miles away is screamed over, cried about and memorialized by anti- abortion groups in false outrage to further a political agenda, while the woman that died in childbirth in a hospital mere minutes away goes unknown, unnoticed and un-mourned.

There were 24 maternal deaths in the state of Kansas in 2011 alone. There were no deaths in the state due to abortion. Where are the memorials for these women? Where is the grief? How many of them left behind orphaned children? And here is one very important question; **how many of them died because of state laws that denied them access to procedures that would have saved their lives?**

Why are women; actual living, breathing, thinking, feeling, sapient, sentient beings, dying in sacrifice to what is, at best, a potential life? It promises, if this bill goes through, to get even worse. In the end, you, as legislators, need to decide whether women are valued members of this state and of society. I beg of you; for the sake of their families, for their already born children and for the people that love and value them, don't let anymore of them die. Please vote against House Bill 2253.

Thank you,
Cait McKnelly