



Heal Without Harm

ETHICAL RESEARCH COALITION

Heal Without Harm is a coalition of organizations and citizens dedicated to working with the scientific community to encourage it toward ethical research. The coalition is composed of member organizations, including: Wisconsin Right to Life, Wisconsin Catholic Conference, Wisconsin Family Action and Pro-Life Wisconsin, among others.



Heal Without Harm Coalition – Wisconsin Catholic Conference, Pro-Life Wisconsin, Wisconsin Family Action, Wisconsin Right to Life

Assembly Health Committee

RE: AB 550—The Unborn Child Disposition and Anatomical Gift Act (part of the Heal Without Harm Legislative Initiative)

Tuesday, November 14, 2017

Distinguished members of the Assembly Health Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. The Heal Without Harm Coalition consists of four organizations: Wisconsin Right to Life – represented by its Executive Director Heather Weinger, Wisconsin Catholic Conference – represented by its Associate Director Barbara Sella, Wisconsin Family Action – represented by its President Julaine Appling, and Pro-Life Wisconsin – represented by its Legislative Director Matt Sande.

The Need for AB 550

Just last month was Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month. It is fitting today to talk about legislation that will provide families who experience the loss of an unborn child information about the final disposition of their baby, and the opportunity to donate their child's remains to scientific research. Allow me to describe briefly what my husband and I (Heather Weinger) experienced four years ago in this regard.

Christmas Eve, 2013, is a day my husband and I will remember forever. It was the day we lost our baby to a miscarriage. When this frantic situation occurred and we went to the hospital for help, I felt so alone and lost. We were given no information about what to do with the remains of our child, we had

no resources to help us cope with our loss, and quite frankly, at this time, I really needed someone to tell me what to do next. Where could we turn for answers?

When a parent is faced with a sudden loss, the one thing you want the most is answers. We may not be able to explain why their child passed away, but the least we can do is give parents information about options for the final disposition and donation of their child's remains. As I look back at my experience, I wish I knew my options for the final disposition of my child. I wish I knew of my ability to donate my child's remains to scientific research.

Even if we can't give parents all the answers, we can give them the information that they need for some closure. We can reaffirm that their child was real, she existed, and she can be a gift to others.

AB 550 is about answers – answers to how we can protect vulnerable unborn children while also advancing scientific research, and answers to how we can provide parents with the information they need after a loss.

Now, more than ever, the public is aware that aborted fetal body parts are being used in research. As a Coalition, we looked at the law in Wisconsin and wondered if there was a way to continue to champion research without the controversy that comes from the trafficking and use of aborted fetal tissue.

Our state needs to do a better job of supporting and promoting the use of ethical tissues. No patient should have to face the difficult choice of using or refusing an unethically-derived treatment. No one should have to ask, *“Do I help myself, or do I support the common good?”*

To aid us in this effort, we asked for the support and direction of two esteemed legislators, Senator Terry Moulton of Chippewa Falls and Representative Joel Kleefisch of Oconomowoc. As leaders, Sen. Moulton and Rep. Kleefisch have continually shown how they value family, ethics, and promoting the common good of all, including the most vulnerable among us. With their guidance, we forwarded the Heal Without Harm Legislative Initiative, AB 459 and AB 550 (SB 423 and SB 424). This initiative is unique to Wisconsin and will make our state a leader in both research and ethics.

What AB 550 Accomplishes

Assembly Bill 550, *The Unborn Child Disposition and Anatomical Gift Act*, requires that in every instance of an unborn child's death due to stillbirth or miscarriage (i.e., where the child dies naturally or accidentally) within a facility, the facility shall inform the mother that she may request her child's remains either for final disposition and/or to make an anatomical gift for research, experimentation, study, or transplantation.

Requiring final disposition for children who are stillborn or miscarried ensures that they receive a proper resting place. Notifying parents that they can request a certificate of birth resulting in stillbirth at any age or weight affirms that their child existed, no matter how small or for how long.

Allowing for anatomical gifts gives parents the comfort of knowing that their child can become a gift for others and also that sufficient ethical fetal tissue is available for researchers.

Assembly Bill 550 also requires the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to study the feasibility of developing a fetal tissue and umbilical cord blood bank for use in research and experimentation. Such banks are vital to scientific advancement and would expand our state's biotech sector.

In short, AB 550 follows the lead of the U.S. Congress, which is currently looking at ways to advance research that does not use aborted fetal tissue. The future of federal research funding is tied to ethical fetal tissue research.

Pro-Life Groups Are United and Pro-Medical Research

The pro-life community is pro-medical research. We want to see medical research move forward in the hopes of discovering treatments for debilitating diseases, and we can move forward ethically so long as we do not degrade human life in order to potentially save it.

Assembly Bill 550 is groundbreaking. All major pro-life groups in Wisconsin, representing tens of thousands of people across our state, support it. Parental donation of organs or tissue from stillborn or miscarried children is a life-affirming, ethical alternative.

We are confident that there is a sufficient supply of ethical fetal tissue to meet research needs. Nationally, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) report that abortions are now about the same number as stillbirths/miscarriages. In Wisconsin, the DHS reports that in 2014, 317 stillbirths occurred after 20 weeks gestation. DHS also reports that in 2015, 359 abortions occurred between 16-20 weeks and 56 after 20 weeks, for a total of 415 abortions. As with other organ and tissue donation, many people are not aware that the gift of their loved one's remains is possible. This is why this legislation is so vital.

When enacted, AB 550 will encourage new avenues of discovery and attract new researchers and biotech firms. This is precisely what happened with induced pluripotent stem cells, or iPS cells, which were discovered after a concerted effort to find an ethical alternative to the controversial embryonic stem cells.

Currently, students and researchers who conscientiously object to using aborted fetal tissue either have to leave their fields entirely or change their research projects. Wisconsin must attract and keep these researchers. We need to find a better way. Wisconsinites deserve the assurance that our state can build on its lead in biotechnology without compromising its bioethics. The Heal Without Harm Legislative Initiative helps provide this assurance.

Concluding Remarks

We thank you for this hearing today. Wisconsin has an extraordinary opportunity to lead the nation by championing research that is ethical, innovative, and effective. The Heal Without Harm Legislative Initiative, of which AB 550 is a part, would make our state a destination for ethical research. We urge you to advance the bill so that it can receive a floor vote early in 2018.

Thank you for your time,

The Heal Without Harm Coalition