

HB1112

Support

Dr. Frank Arlinghaus

3010 Evergreen Way, Ellicott City MD 21042

Please issue a favorable opinion on House Bill 1112. It's important to give information on support programs to parents who receive a difficult prenatal diagnosis.

Perinatal hospice and palliative care is a relatively new field, proposed in 1997, and growing to over 300 programs worldwide, including at least 9 programs in Maryland. These include programs through Anne Arundel Medical Center, Chesapeake Kids, Gilchrist Kids, Holy Cross Hospital, Howard County General Hospital, Isaiah's Promise, Johns Hopkins Hospital, Shady Grove Medical Center, and SilverLeaf Counseling Services. These programs find wide support among the community of perinatal medical professionals, but are often not widely known among the general population.

These programs provide help for families to help continue pregnancies for lives expected to be brief (life limiting conditions), helping parents through this most difficult of times from the time of diagnosis. Too often, parents who experience an adverse prenatal diagnosis are not given adequate support or direction to resources that will support them. These programs give parents real help, real choices, and real support.

My family and the families of several of my friends have experiences with at-risk pregnancies, or with pregnancies in which their child was diagnosed with a life-limiting condition. In most of those cases, one or more medical professionals advocated for termination of the pregnancy even after being told that the parents wanted to move forward with the birth. The exceptions were the ones whose doctors merely left them to their own devices. Not one was connected to a perinatal program, which is why I am advocating for that information to be made more widely available and more easily accessible.

For some of us, the choice to terminate a pregnancy is unthinkable; for others, it doesn't seem like the compassionate choice under the circumstances. Without support or knowledge of the support, however, each of us feels limited in our options and pressured to make what we think is a bad choice. These programs, on the other hand, provide us the support to embrace the all-to-brief shining moments of parenthood, celebrating and grieving in their turn with the support of others.

Opponents of this bill express concern about referring to the unborn as children, or the absence of abortion options from the list of perinatal programs. This bill is not about abortion, which is a standard option presented by doctors, nurses, and even ultrasound technicians, or about what the unborn are called. Instead it's about providing compassionate support options to parents who are experiencing the pain of a life-limiting diagnosis for the baby they are expecting.

This bill would ensure more parents experiencing an adverse prenatal diagnosis would be presented with information to help inform and support them. For this reason, I ask that you return a favorable report on HB1112.