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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1167 PUBLIC HEALTH – ABORTIONS – COERCION (Coercive Abuse Against Mothers Prevention Act)

HB1167 prohibits a person from committing or threatening to commit coercive acts with the intent of leveraging a pregnant woman to have an abortion. It also provides that a pregnant minor is to be considered emancipated for the purposes of being eligible for public assistance in situations where they are without support from parents and/or guardians due to their refusal to voluntarily seek an abortion.

This bill further provides that facilities that perform abortions must post certain signage in certain rooms of the facility to be meant to re-inform that pregnant woman that they have choices and outreach programs available to them.

Abortion is often anything but a “choice.” Using coercive control, women are often subjugated to the desires of others including partners, parents, friends, or employers. The *Daily Beast*, has acknowledged that coerced abortions are a “twisted form of domestic abuse,” occurring more often than previously thought.¹

Coercive abuse can take many forms and is intended to force a woman into “choosing” an abortion. Untold numbers of women have suffered including, by example:

- (1) Katelyn Kampf, a 19-year-old college student and former high school honor student, was bound and gagged by her parents, who disapproved of the child’s father, and forced into a car to make a trip from Maine to New

¹ E. Dwoskin, *A Twisted Form of Domestic Abuse*, (Oct. 8, 2010), available at <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2010/10/08/coerced-abortions-a-new-study-shows-theyre-common.html> (last visited June 27, 2017).

York where they knew someone who would perform an abortion. Fortunately, Katelyn managed to escape when she convinced her parents to let her use the restroom in a store. Police later found a .22 caliber rifle, rope, and duct tape in the car.²

- (2) Sharrona Alexander, an assistant women's basketball coach at the University of California at Berkeley, was told by her boss, Marianne Stanley, that she needed to have an abortion in order to keep her job. When Alexander refused, Stanley demanded her resignation.³
- (3) A 16-year-old Cleveland girl was beaten with a metal broomstick by her father who wanted her to get an abortion.⁴
- (4) A 16 year-old Georgia girl was forced by her mother and two cousins to drink turpentine in order to induce an abortion.⁵
- (5) Shontrese Otrej was told by Emergency Shelters, Inc. of Richmond, Virginia that she would not be eligible for a room because she was pregnant. A staff member then drove her to the bank to withdraw money for an abortion and took her to the abortion clinic.⁶

Clearly, many women who arrive on the doorstep of an abortion clinic are not there of their own free "choice." Instead, they are there because others are pressuring or forcing them to undergo the procedure. Hundreds of women have testified to the devastating effects of their coerced abortions.⁷

² A. P. Samuels, *Police say Maine couple kidnapped daughter, intent on forcing abortion*, (September 18, 2006), available at http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2006/09/18/police_say_maine_couple_kidnapped_daughter_intent_on_forcing_abortion/ (last visited June 27, 2017).

³ A. Benjaminson & G. Chikovani, *Stanley Told Former Assistant to Have Abortion*, (September 17, 2002), available at http://archive.dailycal.org/article/9448/stanley_told_former_assistant_to_have_abortion (last visited June 27, 2017).

⁴ S. McRae, *Cleveland man accused of beating 16-year-old pregnant daughter*, (July 7, 2008), available at http://blog.cleveland.com/metro/2008/07/cleveland_man_accused_of_beati.html (last visited June 27, 2017).

⁵ Associated Press, *Girl, 16, Forced to Drink Turpentine to Induce Abortion*, (September 27, 2006), available at <http://www.nysun.com/national/girl-16-forced-to-drink-turpentine-to-induce/40404/> (last visited June 27, 2017).

⁶ The Elliot Institute, *Forced Abortion in America* (October 2007), available at http://www.afterabortion.org/petition/Forced_Abortions.pdf (last visited June 27, 2017).

⁷ See e.g., *Testimony Directory, Silent No More* <http://www.silentnomoreawareness.org/testimonies/> (last visited June 27, 2017).

At least eighteen states currently have some form of coercive abuse prevention law: Arizona, Delaware, Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin.

Research indicates that violence against pregnant women is a serious problem. Many women report that they were coerced into abortions and have suffered grievous physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual harm as a result. Reproductive healthcare facilities are often the only and last opportunities of hope for victims of coercive abuse and, as such, are in a unique position to help these women. More cases of coerced or attempted coerced abortions are reported if women are informed of their rights and given information concerning treatment and protection options. More women receive treatment for coercive abuse if they are informed of their rights and given information concerning treatment and protection options.

Coercive abuse is a serious women's health issue because it violates a woman's rights to physical and emotional health, freedom of conscience and to freely choose either to continue her pregnancy or to have an abortion.

HB1157 provides for the prohibition of actions intended to coerce or otherwise force a woman to abort her unborn child. More importantly empowers all mothers in the State of Maryland to exercise their freedom of choice in choosing life for their unborn child, free from violent and abusive coercion.

PLEASE ENTER A FAVORABLE REPORT FOR HB 1167