

Testimony of Melissa Ohden, MSW
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Testimony in opposition to SB 798 and HB 705 to place on the ballot a constitutional amendment enshrining constitutional rights to an abortion. SB 798/HB 705 is flawed, as it aims to enshrine a right by denying the right of another human being.

To be targeted for an abortion was denying my right to life. Abortion survivors understand that their lives are more than a choice and should be recognized as such, just as Life is recognized within the documents fundamental to the establishment and guiding values of our nation. I address this with significant authority.

In 1977, my birth mother had a saline infusion abortion forced upon her by my grandmother. This procedure involved injecting a toxic salt solution into the amniotic fluid meant to protect my body from scalding and poison me to death. Despite all odds, I was born alive. I was rescued by a nurse who disobeyed orders to lay me aside to die and rushed me to the NICU. I was estimated to be at 31 weeks gestation and weighed 2 pounds and 14 ounces on the day I now celebrate as my birthday.

My medical records note that an abortion was performed but failed.

I am not alone. As the Founder and CEO of The Abortion Survivors Network (ASN), the only organization in the world to support survivors, data indicates tens of thousands of abortion survivors in the United States alone. In recent years, we have seen a 33% increase in outreach for support, healing, and community by survivors and their family members who have been traumatized by abortion, a “right” that causes significant pain, suffering, and generational trauma. Infants do survive abortion.

Our research at the Abortion Survivors Network indicates that 0.21% of abortions result in a live birth. This means that for every 1,000 abortions, approximately two infants survive. Based on the number of abortions performed nationwide, an average of 1,734 failed abortions result in a live birth every year. Each survivor is a testimony not only of the occurrence of failed abortions but of the value and potential of every unborn infant.

I am alive today because someone else’s “reproductive right” failed to end my life. Yet, life is the foundation of all other rights. The members of the ASN community share the same collective grief that, by the popular definition of “reproductive rights,” we never had the right to live at all.

This is exactly how SB 798 and HB 705 would misdefine reproductive rights.

We need to acknowledge the need for difficult and real conversations about this. The fact is that abortions are not safe for half of the patients in our country. Half of the patients in that office are intended to die, while their moms are often visibly and invisibly scarred.

How can I reconcile my rights as a woman who survived a failed abortion with the rights these bills would provide? It is intellectually dishonest to advance the concept that I had no right to life, but I now possess the right to end the life that is the foundation of all other rights.

More must be done to meet the needs of women and families in our communities in a way that supports lives at all stages of development and in all circumstances. Policies helping women should be life-affirming, not life-ending. Women deserve support and empowerment, and resources to make a decision everyone can live with, even the unborn child.

SB 798 and HB 705 fail to empower women, in fact, they would diminish the capabilities of women and avoid the more difficult challenge of creating a society where every life has value and every woman is supported through pregnancy, and given the option to parent or place her child for adoption.

On behalf of the Abortion Survivors Network, the more than 643 abortion survivors who have connected with us, and the tens of thousands of abortion survivors we know exist, I oppose both SB 798 and HB 705, amendments that would misdefine reproductive rights and deny the most basic right to life.