

Testimony of Vickie Sandell Stangl
Wichita, Kansas
RE: House Bill 2253
Committee on Public Health and Welfare
March 22nd, 2013

Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to speak today. I come before you not only as the president of Wichita NOW, but more importantly as a mother who opposes **HB 2253**.

For years, the focus in the Kansas legislature has been on making it as difficult as possible for women to protect not only their health, but their very lives by demonizing abortions, while promoting pregnancy as the only safe and acceptable choice.

The truth is, the most dangerous state a woman can experience short of going to war is the state of pregnancy. Anything can go wrong no matter how healthy the woman. Society has sugar coated pregnancy and parenthood for years but pregnancy is far more dangerous than abortion.

Yet, one of the components of **HB 2253** is a proposal to expand the **Woman's Right to Know Act** and continue the charade that pregnancy is a risk free condition. **The Woman's Right to Know Act** includes false information about abortions as well as statements about the fetus that are meant to illicit guilt from anyone considering an abortion.

As the wife of a physician, I can state emphatically that there is no science behind the charge that abortions create a health risk for breast cancer, and future miscarriages. However, this act DOES fail to caution women on the REAL dangers inherent in a normal pregnancy such as strokes, blood clots, heart attacks and gestational diabetes. It is outrageous that the state would support **The Woman's Right to Know Act**, by printing brochures that are nothing more than blatant propaganda at taxpayer's expense for those who believe abortion is immoral. It is not the business of the state to do the bidding of anti-abortion groups but that is exactly the purpose of this act.

Like so many young women, I dreamed of having children. I never thought about the risks because society likes to ignore those risks. Then, one day, all of that changed. As a medical student at the University of Iowa, my husband came home with a horrific story that greatly impacted our views about women and reproductive choice. He was on an obstetrics rotation. A woman had gone into labor. She had three healthy boys and was excited about expanding her family. She delivered a healthy baby and the family was celebrating when suddenly, she threw a blood clot and nothing could be done to save her. My husband explained how the physician had to go out into the hall to take the husband aside and explain to him that his wife was dead and his children no longer had a mother. Frankly, it made him sick. My husband promised me he would never expect me to experience pregnancy and childbirth unless I was committed to that danger. Even though modern medicine has erased the memory of what was once a death sentence for many women, the dangers are still lurking every time a woman becomes pregnant. It is not something to enter into lightly or believe that it is a condition every woman must accept as part of her existence.

HB 2253 is a smorgasbord of restrictions that specifically target only women. These gender bias laws ignore a woman's right to life, freedom and the pursuit of happiness all because we don't want women to have the same freedoms men have when it comes to sex; we expect women to pay for their actions. The truth is, reproductive services are not a threat to the community and there is no need for government to rush in with unwarranted remedies. **HB 2253** is crafted to punish, discourage, and wag a

moral finger at any woman who would dare consider aborting her fetus for her own individual well being.

At the 2012 Republican convention the delegates adopted a statement that said, *“Faithful to the self-evident truths enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, we assert the sanctity of human life and affirm that the unborn child has a fundamental individual right to life which cannot be infringed.”*

As a mother, I am here to state that it is outrageous that an unborn fetus should be given full protection under the law while at the same time lawmakers would take away the fundamental freedoms and constitutional rights of women fully born-who should be able to protect their own lives under that same “self-evident” truth.

I know firsthand about the dangers of pregnancy. When my labor began to turn horribly wrong, a quick C-section saved my baby. But it doomed me to more C-sections and created other health issues that I still live with to this day. In my final pregnancy I experienced a potential blood clot in my leg. It was a terrifying ordeal and I would have gladly ended my pregnancy to save my own life if I could have, but nothing could be done except wait. The terror of thinking I might never see my sons grow to adulthood is impossible to describe. Thankfully, the crisis passed and I delivered a healthy baby girl. After this experience, I knew my child-bearing days were over because I had no intentions of risking my life again. Frankly, from my vantage point, no potential life was worth more than my own. If that sounds selfish-so be it. I feel it is far more immoral to leave behind your precious love ones, than choosing to abort a fetus.

In 1892, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the mother of the American Suffrage Movement presented testimony before the New York State Judiciary Committee regarding women’s rights and suffrage. She called the testimony, *“The Solitude of Self.”* In this testimony she pleaded before an all-male legislative body to understand that women are full human beings who must not be deprived of their life and liberty out of man’s so called “protective powers” and take away her independence. Stanton pleaded “Who I ask you, can take, dare take, on himself the rights, the duties, the responsibilities of another human soul?”

Who here has the right to determine any woman’s reproductive decisions? What do you know about their lives, their medical issues, or their mental stability? And yet this is exactly what **HB 2253** does-it aims to step in with the paternalistic power of the state to control women’s bodies. We must be dedicated to upholding a woman’s freedom of conscience, which should not be policed and dictated by the religious beliefs of others. And that is the crux of the abortion debate; whether one religious belief about when life begins, should then be made the law for all, regardless of their own beliefs.

No woman is free who must risk her health, her life and her happiness for their church or state. No woman is “pro-abortion”, but the option must always be available or her right to self-determination is meaningless. The fetus cannot possibly have the same or more rights than the woman, for that simply reduces the woman to a mere incubator.

Ladies and Gentleman, I say to you, no matter how sweeping you make this bill to deny women their most sacred right to their own lives, you will not succeed in stopping women from protecting their lives. All over the world, repressive nations are denying women their most fundamental human rights. It is a sad day when Kansas lawmakers would support such a repressive bill that would take away a woman’s **MOST** fundamental human right-the right to choose her own life, first.

Thank you.

