

January 21, 2020

Joint Senate Judiciary and House Federal and State Affairs Committee:

SCR 1613 and HCR 5019

Value Them Both Constitutional Amendment

Mrs. Kathleen Ahearn; Neonatal Intensive Care Nurse, RN, Rtd.

Written Testimony Only

Chairman Barker, Chairman Wilborn and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for offering me this opportunity to express my support for the Value Them Both Constitutional Amendment for Life.

My name is Kathleen P. Ahearn and, while now retired, I dedicated my life to healthcare as a registered nurse. After earning my nursing degree in the Royal Southern Hospital in Liverpool, England, I accepted positions in London, England, New York City, New York, Santa Clara, California and finally Topeka, Kansas. While I practiced nursing in many hospital departments including pediatrics, my specialty was the care of premature babies in advanced neonatal intensive care, where I worked for more than 25 years.

While we are now familiar with neonatal intensive care units, it was my privilege to care for “preemie babies” in one of the first free-standing NICUs in the San Francisco Bay Area, in the Santa Clara County Hospital. This unit was affiliated with neonatologists from Stanford University Medical School.

The years during which I worked with the Stanford physicians saw ever more advanced, ground-breaking technological and NICU developments. Each year not only were more babies able to survive after premature birth earlier in the pregnancy, but the prognosis for their future health without lasting serious consequences also improved.

In the years since, this trend only continues; with premature babies now surviving and thriving after being born as early as 25 weeks.

Witnessing these scientific and technological developments was always deeply fulfilling as a medical professional. Of course, their true significance lay in the life-saving impact upon the precious babies and wonderful families whose journeys through intensive care always began with the frightening and often traumatic experience of emergency delivery.

We had the privilege of watching the babies and families as they survived complex surgeries, blood transfusions, nasogastric tube feedings and endless rounds of antibiotics. Slowly but surely, the babies gained weight, ounce by ounce, and began to emerge from webs of monitor wires until the joyful day when, often with only supplemental oxygen, babies were able to go home.

Not all the babies admitted to the NICU lived to experience this happy ending, but each and every preemie baby and his or her family were a testament to the infinite value of each baby and how no effort or sacrifice was too great to preserve him or her.

I deeply support the Value Them Both Life Amendment. As a neonatal intensive care specialist, my whole life was dedicated to defending delicate, vulnerable and fragile life for as long as there was even a remote chance a baby would survive. I cannot stand by silently while an industry dedicated to destroying innocent babies is completely deregulated in Kansas.

I would like to be a voice for those babies whose lives are just as precious as the hundreds of babies I was privileged to care for and I ask you to please vote for this Value Them Both Amendment for Life.

Thank You,

Kathleen P. Ahearn, RN Rtd.