



photo art by Megan McCormack

“Heartbeat Bill” divides pro-choice activists

Controversial bill proposed in favor of stricter abortion guidelines

Katherine Hansen | Staff Writer

After passing in the Ohio House, and with sights set on Supreme Court, the newly controversial “Heartbeat Bill” has been put on hold in the Ohio Senate, due to confusion over the multiple modifications proposed at the December 14 hearing. House Bill 125, the “Heartbeat Bill”, proposes banning abortions after the fetal heartbeat can be detected, typically at six to eight weeks into pregnancy.

Janet Porter, President of Faith2Action, and David Forte, a law professor at Cleveland State University, have been credited with the drafting and writing of the bill that would leave exceptions in cases of medical danger to the mother, but not for situations of rape or incest.

The bill’s primary sponsor, State Representative Lynn Wachtmann, got the bill passed through Ohio’s House in June with a 54-44 vote, and is now awaiting the bill’s future in the Ohio Senate. Similar bills have arisen in at least 10 other states aside from Ohio.

“Everyday emergency workers encountering patients first check for a pulse,” Wachtmann said. “Why then should we ignore this critical indicator of life when it comes to the very young?”

Several pro-choice activists, such as Kellie Copeland, Executive Director of NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio, have attacked the bill on the grounds that illegalizing abortions will not stop abortions.

“Outlawing abortion will not make it go away,” Copeland said in a Senate hearing of the bill. “My own

grandmother had an illegal abortion during the Great Depression. Outlawing abortion makes it dangerous.”

Sophomore Nicole Hartshorn supports pro-choice actions for the same reason, fearing the dangers of illegal abortions to women.

“I’m pro-choice because when I think about abortion being illegalized, I believe many women would then go to backstreet procedures, and then that would hurt the women,” Hartshorn said.

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Yet opponents to the bill are not only found in Ohio’s various pro-choice advocates. Within Ohio’s pro-life force itself opposition has come out. Ohio Right to Life, formerly the fore-front leader of many Ohio pro-life forces, does not support the “Heartbeat Bill,” claiming it to be too weak of withstanding legal oppositions and a threat to the group’s other efforts at stopping abortions.

“We’ve tried to shine light on the unintended consequences of the ‘Heartbeat Bill,’” Gonidakis said. “This division is unfortunate because it takes us off message and does not help one mother or protect one baby.”

Hartshorn said she thinks the talk about the bill and its consequential split in Ohio’s chief pro-life group will be beneficial to the pro-life forces overall.

“I think it will help [pro-life forces] because then

people may think, ‘Well, yeah, that is true,’” Hartshorn said. “They’d probably believe the baby is alive once it has a heartbeat.”

The bill has gained many supporters from former factions of Ohio Right to Life; ones that have broken away after learning Ohio Right to Life would not be supporting the bill. Much of the 10 local Right to Life groups, six county chapters including Cincinnati and former President of National Right to Life, Dr. John C.

Willke, have turned their support to the new pro-life group, Ohio ProLife Action, instead.

Although the proposed bill has garnered much attention on all local, state and federal levels, Hartshorn does not believe it will push the bill to its ultimate goal of reaching

federal legalization.

“I don’t think they’ll legalize [House Bill 125], just because I think there’s a large amount of people who would still believe that you can get an abortion,” Hartshorn said. “There are certain situations where it’s better if you have an abortion than if you have the child.”

Contrary to Ohio Right to Life’s fears, Forte said the bill will have no negative penalties if it gets to the Supreme Court and can only help the pro-life cause.

“If a majority of the court at that time exalts abortion over innocent human life, then we are in no worse position than we are without the ‘Heartbeat Bill,’” Forte said. “If the court has a majority that understands the Constitution correctly, then this bill is ready to make history.”