

In Support of HB25-1257 - Relinquishment of Child in Newborn Safety Device

My name is Tom Perille. I am a physician and President of Democrats for Life of Colorado. Today, I am here representing my organization in support of HB25-1257.

Infant mortality is recognized as one of the most pressing concerns in our state, disproportionately affecting people of color. Homicide is the 13th leading cause of death among infants. For females, infancy is the most likely time to be a victim of homicide.⁵ The most vulnerable time for infants is within the first day of life when the death rate from homicide has historically been 10 times greater than any other time during infancy.¹

Neonatal homicide is frequently perpetrated by the mother who might be young, unmarried, and have lower educational attainment.¹⁻² It may involve a mother who has concealed her unintended pregnancy, had limited or no prenatal care, and sometimes reflects a non-hospital birth. Commonly, the relationship with the father has ended or is in the process of ending. It may arise from the realization that the mother has limited available resources to care for the child. Most women implicated in neonatal homicide regret their decision and would have benefited from a clear plan when they became overwhelmed.⁴

During the period between 1989 and 1998 the overall homicide risk for infants was 8.3 per 100,000 person-years but on the first day of life, it was 222.2 per 100,000 person-years. This shocking fact led to the proliferation of Safe Haven Laws since 1999 which attempt to provide vulnerable women and their newborn babies with a clear alternative.

Safe Haven Laws allow a parent to legally surrender an infant who might otherwise be abandoned or endangered. Some form of Safe Haven Laws has been enacted in all 50 states and Puerto Rico. They vary in detail, but they share a common goal – to reduce neonate endangerment. Since their institution, an estimated 4100 infants have been safely surrendered nationwide.

Some may wonder if better access to abortion is the solution to the horribly high neonatal homicide rates. If it were, as abortion rates fell over the last two decades, there would have been a corresponding increase in neonatal homicides. The opposite happened.¹⁻³

Since the institution of Safe Haven Laws, the neonatal homicide rate has dropped by 66%. While correlation does not prove causation, it is safe to assume that Safe Haven Laws have played an important role.

HB25-1257 allows ready and anonymous access to a Colorado Safe Haven Option through the deployment of newborn safety devices at fire stations, hospitals, or community emergency centers. This is at no cost to the taxpayer. HB25-1257 adds another compassionate option for at-risk mothers and infants and deserves your bipartisan support.

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References:

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5. MMWR July 11, 2024, Surveillance for Violent Deaths – National Violent Death Reporting System, 48 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, 2021.