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On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Early Childhood and Behavioral Health

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2901

Position on baby safe haven drop boxes

Background on SAB and safe haven laws

The Save Abandoned Babies Foundation (SAB) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing the illegal abandonment of newborns by raising awareness of the safe, legal options available under Illinois' safe haven law. The Abandoned Newborn Infant Protection Act of 2001 offers a protected, legal alternative to unsafe infant abandonment. Illinois safe havens provide neutral safe zones for newborn infants and their parents. They are the embodiment of the SAB motto: No shame. No names. No blame.

Safe haven laws vary by state but all intend to protect infants who are born into situations that put them at risk of being illegally abandoned or killed. When innovations, new research, or new data related to preventing illegal abandonments come to the attention of the Foundation, SAB board members consider potential impacts and look for opportunities to improve Illinois' law.

Baby drop boxes adopted in Indiana

In 2016, the first drop box appeared in the U.S. in Indiana. Most common in Europe and Asia, safe haven boxes gained attention in the U.S. after they were featured in the 2015 documentary "The Drop Box." It tells the heartwarming story of South Korean Pastor Jong-rak Lee who installed a baby box at his church in Seoul after rescuing a foundling there. Lee and his family have since devoted themselves to the care and placement of these children.

Does Not Supports Personal Contact

While drop boxes have the potential to increase anonymity for parents, we do not recommend their use because they preclude the opportunity for personal contact. This leaves a parent completely alone with an important decision in a time of crisis. Although a parent has the right to hand a baby over and walk away, there is intrinsic value in providing personal contact, however brief it may be.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that first responders who accept an infant under the law experience the exchange as a profoundly loving act. Their presence provides parents with a comforting final memory of their baby in safe hands. Such personal contact presents other important opportunities, including the potential for first-responders to:

Does Not Educate parents on their rights and options.

Parents may have a limited understanding of their parental rights or how traditional and safe haven adoptions differ. Approximately 25% of parents who come to a safe haven intending to surrender an infant under the law choose another option, such as traditional adoption or a parenting plan, when they accept the opportunity to talk to someone.

Does Not Offer medical care and supportive services.

The majority of safe haven babies are delivered by a mother alone and in secret. After a hidden pregnancy, a mother may be more focused on protecting her secret than on protecting herself. She may be afraid to seek post-partum care or counseling. Safe haven staff can help her identify risks, understand privacy laws, and find care and support.

Potential Equipment Failure.

Boxes rely exclusively on electronic connectivity to transmit alerts which are inherently subject to failure due to a multitude of potential disruptions such as loss of service, cut lines, power failures etc. and require frequent testing and maintenance.

Cost.

Oregon has Safe Haven sites at 61 hospitals, over 228 fire departments, and over 174 police stations, not counting the additional locations birthing centers or medical facility. That is over 463 Safe Haven sites.

If boxes were put into just the 228 of the Fire stations (which are already Safe Havens), that would cost at least \$4,560,000 (\$20,000 each), not counting the yearly maintenance and licensing charges, and the renewal fees after 5 years.