

Testimony of Jill L. Stanek, RN
IL Senate Health & Human Services Committee
March 12, 2003

I am a Registered Nurse who worked in the Labor & Delivery Department at Christ Hospital in Oak Lawn, Illinois, for six years until I was terminated for speaking out against its abortion practices in August 2001

Christ Hospital and other hospitals in Illinois such as Illinois Masonic, Rush Presbyterian St. Lukes, and Lutheran General, perform a method of abortion in a mother's second or even third trimesters of pregnancy that sometimes results in babies being aborted alive.

The goal of this particular abortion procedure is to cause a pregnant woman's cervix to open by use of medications so she will deliver a premature baby who dies during the birth process or soon afterward.

When I worked at the hospital, in the event that a baby was aborted alive, he or she was not given any medical care but is rather given what the hospital calls "comfort care." "Comfort care" is defined as keeping the baby warm in a blanket until the baby dies, although until recently even this was not always done. Until recently if staff or parents did not have time or inclination to hold the dying aborted baby, the baby was taken to the Soiled Utility Room and left there alone to die.

It is not uncommon for a live aborted babies to linger for an hour or two or even longer. One of these babies once lived for almost an entire eight-hour shift. In the year 2001, of the 13 babies I am aware of who were aborted at Christ Hospital, at least four lived between 1-1/2 to

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3 hours, two boys and two girls. Christ Hospital stresses that it aborts babies with very serious mental or physical handicaps. But the hospital will also abort for life or health of the mother. So at least two of the second-trimester babies who were aborted last year, for instance, were completely healthy.

One night, a nursing co-worker was taking an aborted Down's syndrome baby who was born alive to our Soiled Utility Room because his parents did not want to hold him, and she did not have time to hold him. I could not bear the thought of this suffering child dying alone in a Soiled Utility Room, so I cradled and rocked him for the 45 minutes that he lived. He was 21 to 22 weeks old, weighed about ½ pound, and was about 10 inches long. He was too weak to move very much, expending any energy he had trying to breathe. Toward the end he was so quiet that I couldn't tell if he was still alive unless I held him up to the light to see if his heart was still beating through his chest wall. After he was pronounced dead, we folded his little arms across his chest, wrapped him in a tiny shroud, and carried him to the hospital morgue where all of our dead patients are taken.

A Support Associate told me she accidentally threw a live aborted baby in the garbage, who had been left on the counter of the Soiled Utility Room wrapped in a disposable towel. When the associate realized what she had done, she started going through the trash to find the baby, and the baby fell out of the towel and on to the floor.

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I was told about a situation in the Spring of 2001 by a nursing coworker who said, "I can't stop thinking about it." She had a patient who was just over 23 weeks pregnant, and she was not going to be able to complete her pregnancy to term. The baby was healthy and had up to a 39% chance of survival, according to national statistics. But the patient chose to abort. The baby was born alive. If the mother had wanted everything done for her baby, there would have been a neonatologist, pediatric resident, neonatal nurse, and respiratory therapist present for the delivery, and the baby would have been taken to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit for specialized care. Instead, the only personnel present for this delivery were an obstetrical resident and my coworker. The baby, who showed early signs of thriving, was merely wrapped in a blanket and kept in the Labor & Delivery Department until she died 2-1/2 hours later.

When I described the aforementioned 23-weeker's death in a Senate Committee last year, the Illinois ACLU attorney said her rights should have been covered by law. Previously, I had sent the specifics of that incident to then Illinois Attorney General Jim Ryan, who did not find any illegalities. So I wrote two letters to the Illinois ACLU subsequent to that hearing, asking them to help me defend the civil rights of that little girl to equal protection under the law. I never heard back from the Illinois ACLU.

A specific law is needed in Illinois to declare that born babies are legal persons.

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SB1082 before you today is identical to the national Born Alive Infants Protection Act, which was signed into law by President Bush on August 5, 2002.

The Born Alive Infants Protection Act has never been challenged in court. It was the only pro-life bill that Senator Tom Daschle allowed to be voted on in the U.S. Senate during his entire tenure as Senate President, from May 2001 to January 2003.

The National Abortion and Reproductive Rights League stated in a June 13, 2001, press release, "NARAL does not oppose passage of the Born Alive Infants Protection Act."

The Born Alive Infants Protection Act passed in the Senate by a vote of 98-0. Senator Ted Kennedy stated during the June 28, 2001, Senate Floor debate on this bill, "I am going to urge the Senate to accept the amendment."

Barbara Boxer stated during the same debate, "I, as being a pro-choice Senator... representing my colleagues here, have no problem whatsoever with this amendment.... I feel good that we can, in fact, vote for this together. It is very rare that we can. Simply put, this amendment says it all in its purpose: 'To protect infants who are born alive.' Of course, of course.... We join with an 'aye' vote on this. I hope it will, in fact, be unanimous. I urge an 'aye' vote."

I do, too. Thank you.