

Bill to make motherhood easier for college students

WASHINGTON – As the debate rages on about whether abortion should be restricted or made more available, Feminists for Life sees clearly that abortion is a choice that no woman wants to make.

Members of the organization were on Capitol Hill Aug. 14 to explain their support for the Elizabeth Cady Stanton Pregnant and Parenting Student Services Act of 2007, which was reintroduced to both houses of Congress this year. This bill would establish programs at universities to support pregnant college women, so they don't have to make the difficult choice between their education and parenting a child.

The organization also introduced five women who shared their stories and will tour the country visiting college campuses to spread the organization's message that "women deserve better than abortion," said Serrin Foster, president of Feminists for Life.

Some of the women had chosen abortion in the past; others had considered abortion but decided to keep the children or give them up for adoption. One, Melissa Ohden, said her mother attempted to abort her using a saline solution, but the procedure failed.

Although doctors said she would be permanently debilitated, Ohden was not. She was adopted, and said she's not bitter about how she was born – four months early, weighing 2 pounds, 14 ounces and assumed dead.

"There are millions of babies every year that aren't as lucky," she said.

Each of the women who considered or chose abortion said her experiences arose from doubts about how she could support a child resulting from an unplanned pregnancy with so few resources available.

To help pregnant and parenting college students continue their educations, Sens. Elizabeth Dole, R-N.C., and Ben Nelson, D-Neb., introduced the Elizabeth Cady Stanton Pregnant and Parenting Student Services Act of 2007 in March.

The bill would provide up to \$50 million in grants to encourage colleges and universities to establish offices that would serve students who have children or are pregnant, even those who plan to give their children up for adoption.

The bill is named after Stanton because she was a pioneer in women's suffrage and

especially advocated women's higher education.

Women in college are effectively being forced, by lack of opportunities, to choose between motherhood and continuing their education, Foster said in an interview with Catholic News Service.

The Senate bill is modeled after a Feminists for Life program that began at Washington's Georgetown University in 1997, and the House of Representatives is considering a bill of the same name, introduced in February by Reps. Marcy Kaptur, D-Ohio, and Sue Myrick, R-N.C.

Deirdre McQuade, director of planning and information for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, said the conference offers strong support of this bill as a step toward changing the culture of college campuses to make them more "pregnancy- and parenting-friendly."

Citing the Alan Guttmacher Institute, McQuade said the leading reason that women seek abortions is that they lack either practical resources to care for a child or emotional support from their families.

"Typically, women are abandoned to that choice, not empowered by it," she said.

Of the nearly 3,700 abortions in the United States each day, women younger than 25 obtain 52 percent of them, and 75 percent of all women who obtain abortions say they feel a child would interfere with their education or career, according to the institute.

Feminists for Life was established in 1972 and works through advocacy and legislation to support pregnant women and their families. Foster said that too often the choice to have an abortion is no choice at all, but merely a last resort when they discover no programs will support their choice to keep the child.

In recent years, the organization has expanded its scope to include not just working women who lack benefits and maternity leave, but college women as well.