

To: Members of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform
From: Grazie Pozo Christie, M.D.
Date: September 29, 2022
Subject: Protecting Pain-Capable Unborn Children from Late-Term Abortions

The Protecting Pain-Capable Unborn Children from Late-Term Abortions Act, sponsored by Congressman Chris Smith and Senator Lindsey Graham would protect unborn children across the country from elective abortion after 15 weeks. The bill is a no-brainer from my perspective as a physician. I see fetal patients of this age and older regularly and their humanity is manifest and indisputable.

The little patients I examine by ultrasound are, at 15 weeks, endearingly human and bracingly alive. Sometimes I catch them while they are sleeping. More often I find them exercising their limbs in the dark and peaceful wombs that so beautifully accommodate them. At that stage of development, their organs are functioning--hearts beating, mouths swallowing, bladders filling and emptying. Their toes curl and their fingers probe while their eyes open and close on the impenetrable blackness that surrounds them. I can even distinguish their sex at 15 weeks. Most parents leave with a gaily decorated black and white image of their little darling: I'm a boy! Or I'm a girl! to put proudly on the refrigerator and share with fond grandparents.

These are the vulnerable people that Congressman Smith and Senator Graham and their colleagues propose to protect. Most western countries already do so at 15 weeks or earlier, including [the vast majority](#) of European nations.

There are good reasons for drawing a line at 15 weeks, minimum. For one, recent studies have shown that fetuses may feel the pain of dismemberment abortion [as early as](#) 12 weeks. Our understanding of neural pathways in the unborn grows every year, and fetal pain is becoming a consideration earlier and earlier in gestation. When unborn children require surgery, even at 15 weeks of gestation, they are removed from their mothers' wombs and carefully anesthetized before a scalpel touches them.

Second and third trimester abortions are likewise much more punishing physically for the mother and more dangerous than first trimester abortions. Surgical abortion through 13 weeks is performed through suction curettage and it is considered minor surgery. After 15 weeks the mother is [subjected](#) to Dilatation and Evacuation (D&E) abortion, sometimes accompanied by full labor induction. These are long and involved, painful multi-day procedures. The [risks](#) of uterine perforation, heavy bleeding, pelvic infection, and a torn cervix rise increase with every advancing week of gestation.

Protecting the unborn after 15 weeks makes even more sense given medical realities too often obscured by misinformation. One example is the claim that only a handful of abortions are performed in the U.S. after 15 weeks of gestation. The actual [number](#) is actually about 55,800—a shocking figure when you consider the very real possibility of fetal pain and the vastly increased health risk for the mother. Another example of misinformation is that women who seek to abort their second and third trimester children are doing so because of a personal health crisis or

because the child is severely disabled. The pro-abortion Guttmacher Institute keeps the most complete statistics available on this which [inform](#) us that women abort after 15 weeks for the same reasons they abort before 15 weeks: namely, for social, economic and family reasons.

The fact is that protecting fetuses at 15 weeks makes imminent sense—out of compassion for the little ones and concern for the safety of their mothers. Americans of all stripes find that bright line appropriate. A [Harvard-Harris poll](#) conducted in June showed that 70% of Independents and 60% of Democrats thought their states should protect unborn children from elective termination starting at 15 weeks. Broken down by sex, 75% of women and 69% of men felt the same way. Only 10% of respondents thought there should be no protection of the unborn at all.

Congressman Smith's and Senator Graham's approach is in line with Americans' sentiments and values—and is more humane—than the view held by pro-abortion activists and the Democratic Party. In fact, their view that the unborn deserve no protections whatsoever is a radical position shared by a tiny fraction of the population. Perhaps Democrats should begin to listen to the American people on this issue. If they did, they'd soon find we are far more humane and compassionate than given credit for—not only toward the youngest among us but toward their mothers.