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use of this procedure may be necessary to save a woman's life or to protect her against serious injury to her health. In these situations, in which a woman and her family must make an awful choice, the Constitution requires, as it should, that the ability to choose this procedure be protected.

In the past several months, I have heard from women who desperately wanted to have their babies, who were devastated to learn that their babies had fatal conditions and would not live, who wanted anything other than an abortion, but who were advised by their doctors that this procedure was their best chance to avert the risk of death or grave harm which, in some cases, would have included an inability to ever bear children again. For these women, this was not about choice—not about deciding against having a child. These babies were certain to perish before, during or shortly after birth, and the only question was how much grave damage was going to be done to the woman.

I cannot sign H.R. 1833, as passed, because it fails to protect women in such dire circumstances—because by treating doctors who perform the procedure in these tragic cases as criminals, the bill poses a danger of serious harm to women. This bill, in curtailing the ability of women and their doctors to choose the procedure for sound medical reasons, violates the constitutional command that any law regulating abortion protect both the life and the health of the woman. The bill's overbroad criminal prohibition risks that women will suffer serious injury.

That is why I implored Congress to add an exemption for the small number of compelling cases where selection of the procedure, in the medical judgment of the attending physician, was necessary to preserve the life of the woman or avert serious adverse consequences to her health. The life exception in the current bill only covers cases where the doctor believes that the woman will die. It fails to cover cases where, absent the procedure, serious physical harm, often including losing the ability to have more children, is very likely to occur. I told Congress that I would sign H.R. 1833 if it were amended to add an exception for serious health consequences. A bill amended in this way would strike a proper balance, remedying the constitutional and human defect of H.R. 1833. If such a bill were presented to me, I would sign it now.

I understand the desire to eliminate the use of a procedure that appears inhumane. But to eliminate it without taking into consideration the rare and tragic circumstances in which its use may be necessary would be even more inhumane.

The Congress chose not to adopt the sensible and constitutionally appropriate proposal I made, instead leaving women unprotected against serious health risks. As a result of this Congressional indifference to women's health, I cannot, in good conscience and consistent with my responsibility to uphold the law, sign this legislation.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
April 10, 1996.

Letter to Joseph Cardinal Bernardin on Partial Birth Abortion Legislation

April 10, 1996

Dear Cardinal Bernardin:

I want to thank you for your letter on H.R. 1833. I appreciate and considered the strong moral convictions you expressed.

This is a difficult and disturbing issue, one which I have studied and prayed about for many months. I am against late-term abortions and have long opposed them, except where necessary to protect the life or health of the mother. As Governor of Arkansas, I signed into law a bill that barred third trimester abortions, with an appropriate exception for life or health, and I would sign such a bill now if it were presented to me.

Indeed, when I first heard the procedure referred to in H.R. 1833 described, I thought I would support the bill. But as I studied the matter and learned more about it, I came to understand that this is a rarely used procedure, justifiable as a last resort when doctors judge it necessary to save a woman's life or to avert serious health consequences to her.

In the past months, I have learned of several cases of women who desperately wanted to have their babies, who were devastated to learn that their babies had fatal conditions and would not live, who wanted anything

other than an abortion, but who were advised by their doctors that this procedure was their best chance to avert the risk of death or grave harm which, in some cases, would have included an inability to ever bear children again. For these women, this was not about choice. This was not about having a headache or fitting into a prom dress, as some have regrettably suggested. This was not about choosing against having a child. These babies were certain to perish before, during or shortly after birth. The only question was how much grave damage was going to be done to the woman.

In short, I do not support the use of this procedure on an elective basis where it is not necessary to save the life of the woman or prevent serious risks to her health.

That is why I implored Congress to add a limited exemption for the small number of compelling cases where use of the procedure is necessary to avoid serious health consequences. The life exception in the current bill fails to cover cases where the doctor believes not that the mother's death is probable, but rather that, without the procedure, serious physical harm, often including losing the ability to have more children, is very likely to occur. I want to say again that if Congress will amend the bill as I have suggested, remedying its constitutional and human defect, I will sign the bill.

Again, I thank you for your concern. These are painful and sobering issues. I understand your desire to eliminate the use of a procedure you see as inhumane. But to eliminate it without taking into consideration the rare and tragic circumstances in which its use may be necessary would be, in my judgment, even more inhumane.

Although I know you disagree with me on this matter, I hope we can continue our dialogue and continue to work together on the broad array of issues on which we do agree. I need your help and your insight.

Sincerely,

Bill Clinton

NOTE: The letter was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 10, but was not issued as a White House press release.

Proclamation 6882—National D.A.R.E. Day, 1996

April 10, 1996

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Drug abuse and violence pose serious threats to the health and well-being of American youth. We must redouble our efforts to help children understand the consequences of destructive behaviors and give them the tools they need to succeed. This critical endeavor requires all of us—government, law enforcement, schools, religious communities, and families—to work together.

Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) is a proven means of communicating a strong anti-drug, anti-violence message to students of all ages. This year, D.A.R.E. will provide 33 million young people, from kindergartners to 12th graders, with information and strategies to help them resist peer pressure and to avoid drugs, tobacco, inhalants, and alcohol abuse throughout their lives. Reaching children in 30 countries, all 50 States, and 70 percent of our Nation's school districts, D.A.R.E. also empowers students with vital conflict resolution and anger management skills.

Today and throughout the year, let us recognize this program as a model of effective, grassroots organization and commend D.A.R.E. officers for their dedicated efforts to promote health and safety. As an integral and valued part of countless American schools, these caring men and women are joining parents, teachers, and concerned citizens everywhere to help children lead safe, healthy, productive lives.

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim April 11, 1996, as National D.A.R.E. Day. I call upon families, educators, and all the people of the United States to observe this day with appropriate activities and programs.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this tenth day of April, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-