



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada

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Bill to Protect Fetuses Would Hurt Pregnant Women

OTTAWA — A private member's bill that would give a fetus legal rights would not only endanger abortion rights, but would hurt pregnant women trying to have a baby, according to the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada, a national pro-choice group.

Bill C-484, "The Unborn Victims of Violence Act," would allow charges to be laid in the death of a fetus if the pregnant woman is a victim of a crime. It was introduced in Parliament on Wednesday by Conservative MP Ken Epp, who is anti-abortion.

"The intent of this law is to give rights to fetuses so that abortion can be re-criminalized," said Joyce Arthur, Coordinator of the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC). She noted that anti-abortion groups are the ones promoting this law. "They're desperate to find a way to reverse abortion rights, and it's very unfortunate that they're exploiting the tragic murders of pregnant women to do so."

But Arthur says an "Unborn Victims of Violence Act" would endanger the rights of all pregnant women, including those trying to have a baby. Thirty-seven American states have so-called "Fetal Homicide" laws, which she says have ended up being used mostly against pregnant women themselves, not third parties who assault pregnant women. "Dozens of pregnant women in the U.S. have been arrested, prosecuted, and jailed for behaviour perceived to harm their fetuses," said Arthur. "Arrests of pregnant women have even occurred in cases where the law targets only third parties and exempts pregnant women from prosecution." This occurs because such laws create a confusing legal contradiction between "fetal rights" and the rights of pregnant women.

"This kind of law has no rational basis," said Catherine Megill, another ARCC spokesperson. "It is designed to satisfy emotional needs, and the wish for punishment and vengeance. While we deeply sympathize with the victims' families, there's just no evidence that an Unborn Victims of Violence Act will have any beneficial or deterrent effect. In fact, it would do nothing to prevent domestic abuse or protect pregnant women."

What is really needed, says Megill, are more comprehensive measures to prevent domestic violence. "Resources and supports to protect pregnant women from domestic violence would actually do much more to help them and their fetuses," said Megill. "This would also help women who have recently given birth and women who have abortions against their partner's wishes. These women are at increased risk of domestic violence too, and an Unborn Victims of Violence Act would completely fail them."

(For more information on the harms of a "fetal homicide" law, please see our Position Paper at: www.arcc-cdac.ca/postionpapers/57-Fetal-Homicide-Law.pdf)

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