



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Chair Lieber, Vice Chair Knopp, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for hearing HB 3626 in the Senate Committee on Rules. This bill is the result of a news story I saw last summer of an infant being anonymously surrendered under Texas' "Baby Moses" law. I will be honest, I found myself quite baffled by the story, as I had no idea that Baby Moses laws (or as I would come to find out, "Safe Surrender" as it is regarded in Oregon) were even an option.

Unlike Texas and many other states, Oregon does not require signage at designated Safe Surrender sites, which help create public awareness of the legal, no-questions-asked, ability to anonymously surrender an infant and avoid risking criminal prosecution from resorting to other options. I was surprised to learn that Oregon's Safe Surrender law had been passed in 2001, and was alarmed at the lack of awareness even those working at Safe Surrender locations had regarding this protection. In an attempt to cultivate more awareness, my office started working on what is now HB 3626.

Along the way, we discovered that some iteration of Safe Surrender/Safe Harbor/Baby Moses laws exist in all 50 states, but as was the case with required signage, the laws differ across the country. A few states, including our neighboring Washington and California, offer parents a mere 72 hours after birth to safely surrender their infant, and others offer up to a full year of no-questions-asked surrender. Realizing that our neighbors have such weak protections to legally surrender an infant, my goal of creating awareness around Oregon's existing law expanded to look at ways we could also strengthen this protection and eliminate any deterrents possible for parents finding themselves in a situation to need to consider surrendering their child.

Extending Oregon's current time limit of 30 days after birth to 60 days, would move Oregon into the top 7 states for this protection but also gives parents more time to utilize it when we all know those first few months parenthood can be tumultuous and full of change. I never want to judge the situation a parent finds themselves in, and honestly cannot imagine what degree of crisis or desperation someone would be in to consider abandoning or surrendering their infant, but I do know that no matter the situation, I would rather them have a safe, protected means available to them rather than risking criminal prosecution—even if it takes them a little longer to come to that realization.

Since starting this journey of looking into Safe Surrender laws, I've seen many stories of surrenders and abandonments across the country, and all have included a call from law enforcement for the need for more public awareness about safe surrender protections. HB 3626's requirement for conspicuous signage at Safe Surrender locations will help achieve that as we pass by these locations in our communities every day. And hopefully, with the strengthening of Oregon's Safe Surrender laws combined with expanded awareness, we'll never again see headlines like we did in March where a mother was arrested for attempted murder after leaving her baby in a gas station trash can in Fullerton, California.

Protections like Safe Surrender only work if people know about them, and I hope you'll join me in supporting HB 3626. Thank you again for hearing this bill.

Regards,

Jami Cate
State Representative
Oregon House District 11