

July 7, 2003

Senator John Kerry  
304 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

FAX NUMBER: 202-224-8525

Dear Senator Kerry:

I am the mother of Laci Peterson and the grandmother of Conner Peterson. I am writing to ask you to support the Unborn Victims of Violence Act, which is now also referred to as "Laci and Conner's Law" at my family's request.

You have seen the press coverage regarding the brutal murders of my daughter and grandson, and I expect that you are aware that two homicide charges have been filed by state authorities. However, if my daughter had been killed in a federal jurisdiction, or during commission of a federal crime, my grandson's murder would not be recognized or charged. It is that gap in federal law that we seek to correct with Laci and Conner's Law.

When a criminal attacks a woman who carries an unborn child, he claims two victims. I am told that 28 states (including Massachusetts) now recognize the unborn child as a separate crime victim in at least some circumstances -- counting Texas, where the governor signed a comprehensive law within the past month.

I have seen a letter that you recently sent to constituents, in which you said, "I have serious concerns about this legislation because the law cannot simultaneously provide that a fetus is a human being and protect the right of the mother to choose to terminate her pregnancy. Therefore, I do not support the Unborn Victims of Violence Act."

Senator, this is not an abortion issue. California's unborn victim law has been the books since 1970 and it does not affect the availability of legal abortion, nor have any of the similar laws in effect in more than half the states. The Unborn Victims of Violence Act explicitly says that it does not apply to abortion, or to any acts of the mother herself. Having said that, I have no difficulty understanding that any legislator or group opposed to abortion logically would also support this bill to protect the lives of unborn children like Conner from violent criminal actions, and I welcome their support. What I find difficult to understand is why groups and senators who champion the pro-choice cause are blind to the fact that these two-victim crimes are the ultimate violation of choice.

Sponsors of the federal bill have told me that when the Senate takes up Laci and Conner's Law, a "single-victim" bill will be offered in its place -- a bill that would increase

penalties for federal crimes if the victim happens to be pregnant, but without recognizing the killing of an unborn child as a loss of life. Then the Senate will have to choose between the two bills. Judging from your letter, it seems that you are currently inclined towards this single-victim approach. But I urge you to oppose the single-victim bill. That bill would not recognize that there are two victims in cases like my family's. In fact, it would enshrine in law the offensive concept that such crimes have only a single victim -- the pregnant woman.

Please understand how adoption of such a single-victim proposal would be a painful blow to those, like me, who are left to grieve after a two-victim crime, because Congress would be saying that Conner and other innocent victims like him are not really victims -- indeed, that they never really existed at all. But our grandson did live. He had a name, he was loved, and his life was violently taken from him before he ever saw the sun.

And what about mothers who survive criminal attacks but lose their babies? I don't understand how any senator can vote to force prosecutors to tell such a grieving mother that she didn't really lose a baby -- when she knows to the depths of her soul that she did.

The single-victim bill seems to be based on the idea that the only thing that matters is how severe a sentence can be imposed -- but that is wrong. It is important that the punishment be severe, definitely. But it is also important that the true nature of the crime be recognized. This is a question not only of severity, but of justice. The single-victim proposal would be a step away from justice, not toward it. If this single-victim bill were the law in California, there would be no second homicide charge for the murder of Conner. But there were two bodies that washed up in San Francisco Bay, and the law should recognize that reality.

Senator Kerry, in the interests of justice, I implore you to reject the single-victim proposal and support the Unborn Victims of Violence Act.

Sincerely,



Sharon Rocha