



Ohio Star Legacy testifies for stillbirth tax credit



Doug Livingston, Heather Johnston Welliver, Justin Welliver and Beth Swartz testified at the Ohio Statehouse Tuesday, March 13, in front of the House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee.

The Ohio House of Representatives is considering a one-time, \$2,000 tax credit for stillborn babies, as a way to recognize the children and grant some financial relief to grieving families, thanks to the work of the Ohio Chapter of the Star Legacy Foundation.

Ohio Star Legacy members testified Tuesday, March 13, before the House Ways and Means Committee on House Bill 507.

Chapter Chair Heather Johnston Welliver and Secretary Justin Welliver, of Westerville, spoke about their daughter, Lydia Joanne, who was born still Nov. 6, 2014.

"She was perfect, with big flipper feet, long fingers a cute button nose and dark hair like her Dad's. She was perfect but she was no longer alive," Johnston Welliver told committee members. "Weeks later, after my milk had come in with no baby to feed, the hospital bills started to arrive. Those bills are painful enough with a living child, but when you have no baby at home, they are heartbreaking."

Ohio averaged 900 stillbirths a year between 2003 and 2016, according to the state Department of Health. The numbers are not budging. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Ohio ranked seventh in the country for the number of stillbirths in 2015.

Nationally, every year, about 26,000 babies are stillborn, defined as death in utero after 20 weeks gestation.

Ohio allows families to receive stillbirth certificates, but the state offers little other help.

"The harsh truth is that a child that never takes a breath is not recognized as a person, is not covered by insurance and cannot be claimed as a dependent under the current tax law," Justin Welliver said.

Doug Livingston testified about his daughter Emma.

"The placenta that nurtured our Emma just separated while we slept. We strived in every way for a healthy pregnancy. There was no trauma and, ultimately, no suitable explanation for our loss. We were told: 'sometimes it just happens.' Two-thirds of parents like us get that line."

Nurse Beth Swartz talked about the hurdles grieving parents face when they leave the hospital.

"These families leave this sacred space, only to be challenged with situations where their children are not recognized: The acquaintance who says, 'At least you are young. You will have more kids,' the denial from their employer for bereavement leave, no birth certificate being issued by the state, and not being able to claim these babies on their taxes. Additionally, they are faced with an immense financial burden: hospital bills, funeral expenses, lost work revenue, are just to name a few."

The Ohio chapter is pushing for a stillbirth tax credit because costs related to stillbirth are not all covered by insurance, and because we want a symbolic gesture recognizing stillbirth. The bill could also provide an opportunity to educate lawmakers about the prevalence of the deaths.

Six states already have adopted stillbirth tax credits:

Thanks for coming to our first meet up!



The Ohio Chapter of the Star Legacy Foundation hosted its first meet up in February.

Caius, Massimo, JP, Ashlie, Eloise R., and Eloise M were all loved on and remembered at Masthead Brewing Co. in Cleveland. Thanks, Kati Smith, for organizing!

Interested in hosting a meet up near you? We'd love that! Contact Heather Johnston Welliver at ohiochapter@starlegacyfoundation.org.

Save the date for Lydie's Loop!



SEP 22 Lydie's Loop: Steps against Stillbirth 2018
Sat 8 AM
Helen, Kati and Jaime

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The Ohio Chapter of the Star Legacy Foundation will host its biggest fundraiser, Lydie's Loop: Steps Against Stillbirth, in September.

Mark your calendars for Saturday, Sept. 22, 2018, for the third annual event, featuring 5K run, 1-mile walk, children's activities, raffle, silent auction and reading of baby names.

Lydie's Loop, named after Lydia Welliver, who was stillborn in November 2014, is a great opportunity for families to celebrate their children and meet other parents who have suffered perinatal loss.

Find more information here: www.lydiesloop.org.

Want to volunteer? Contact Heather Johnston Welliver at ohiochapter@starlegacyfoundation.org.

Star Legacy is coming to the Cleveland Clinic

The Cleveland Clinic has agreed to host a perinatal loss conference with the Ohio Chapter of the Star Legacy Foundation at Fairview Hospital July 30. More info to come!

- North Dakota, 2017
- Minnesota, 2016
- Missouri, 2015
- Indiana, 2007
- Michigan, 2006
- Arizona, 2004

State Rep. Anne Gonzalez, a Republican from Westerville, is sponsoring the bill, which you can find here: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA132-HB-507>

We need your help! Read on for how you get support the legislation!

Support the Ohio stillbirth tax credit: Contact your Ohio representative

To pass the \$2,000 tax credit for parents of stillborn babies, we need your help. Please tell your state representative that you support House Bill 507 and you'd like them to vote for it.

(We'll contact senators when the bill is being considered there.)

Whether you are the parent of a stillborn child, a friend or family member or a citizen looking for an important cause, you can call or email your legislators.

To make it easy, use the Voter Voice tool. Just fill out your name and address, and it'll send emails to representatives for you.

Want to follow up?

You can find your Ohio state representative and senator here: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislators/find-my-legislators>.

A few tips for drafting your own emails, or making a call.:

- Keep it short and to the point.
- Register to vote first. (Representatives' staff may check this.)
- Make sure you include your name and address, as well as your support for House Bill 507.
- Make it personal, using the name of your baby and as much of your story as you'd like.

Need more help? Contact Justin Welliver at justinkwelliver@gmail.com.

Want more Star Legacy Ohio news?

Find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/OhioStarLegacyFoundation and on Twitter @OhioStarLegacy. And consider joining our board. We're always looking for volunteers!

Star Legacy in the news

Cleveland.com covered the Ohio Chapter's testimony on the stillbirth tax credit bill. You can find it here:

Parents of stillborn babies ask lawmakers to back bill offering tax credit

Making baby gowns from wedding dresses



Ohio Star Legacy has received all sorts of wedding dresses, to make gowns for stillborn babies. Thank you! And thank you for those who have volunteered to sew!

Want to get involved, or donate a dress? Email the chapter at ohiochapter@starlegacyfoundation.org.