

Support Her, Protect Them.

[SDRTL's Response to HB1212]

By: Dr. Fred Deutsch, SDRTL's National RTL Liaison



For more than 20 years, I've been honored to serve in the pro-life movement — including as past president of the South Dakota Right to Life board and currently serving on the National Right to Life board.

Recently, a bill was introduced in South Dakota that would have allowed women to face criminal prosecution — even life in prison — for abortion. I believe it's important to provide some context.

The idea of sentencing women to prison for abortion is not new. It has been debated for well over 100 years. Yet today, **there is no state** in the country that allows women to be prosecuted for abortion. In recent years, a national organization has introduced similar legislation in roughly a dozen states — and every single one has failed, often with little or no support.

There are many reasons for that. Coercion is real, and likely more common than many realize. Some women are pressured by partners or family, and laws like this carry serious unintended consequences.

Treating women primarily as criminals — or even speaking about them that way — shifts the pro-life message from compassion to condemnation. Many long-time pro-life leaders, including post-abortive women who now help others find healing, have warned against this kind of shame-based approach. Their message is simple: if our response to abortion focuses more on punishing women than helping them, we don't just lose political support — we lose the very people we're trying to reach.

The question for pro-lifers should be this:

Do we focus on cutting off the illegal supply chain of abortion drugs — or do we focus on sending women in crisis to prison?

If we want a strong, unified pro-life movement, I believe we have to focus on what actually works — morally, legally, and practically. In short: support her, protect them.

Here are constructive paths forward that bring the coalition together:

- **Cut off the abortion drug supply chain.** More than half of abortions now occur via pills. Enforcing existing law, stopping illegal mail distribution, and holding manufacturers and distributors accountable is far more effective than punishing women after the fact.
- **Focus criminal enforcement on bad actors — not women.** Illegal providers, traffickers, coercive partners, and those distributing abortion drugs in violation of the law should face serious consequences.
- **Strengthen pregnancy resource centers.** PRCs save lives because women trust them. Policies should protect confidentiality, expand life-affirming services, and keep these centers true safe harbors.
- **Make abortion unthinkable by making support unavoidable.** Housing help, healthcare access, prenatal care, parenting support, adoption services, and workplace flexibility all reduce abortion demand.
- **Enforce parental consent, informed consent, and safety laws.** These laws already exist but are unevenly enforced. Consistent enforcement protects minors and ensures accountability without criminalizing mothers.
- **Invest in prevention, not punishment.** Education and early intervention reduce crisis pregnancies. Prevention saves more lives than prosecution ever will.
- **Keep the movement focused on outcomes — not purity tests.**

The goal is fewer abortions and stronger families — not ideological one-upmanship.

These approaches save lives, and they reflect how most South Dakotans think about this issue: **firm in principle, but grounded in reality.**

I don't believe South Dakotans would tolerate sending post-abortive women to prison, much less for life. And I believe a law like that would quickly be repealed by a broad coalition of citizens — while also triggering a new "Amendment G" ballot fight that puts everything at risk.

We don't have to choose between protecting life and governing responsibly. We can do both.

Support her. Protect them.

That's how we build a culture of life — and keep this movement strong.