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# Miracle Micah, His Story

## Support the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act

Dear Colleague,

This week the House will vote to protect children at 20 weeks and greater from painful late abortion. Just last week the New York Times published a story reporting on a New England Journal of Medicine study they said was "one of the largest and most systematic examinations of care for very premature infants." The study demonstrated that some babies born at 22 weeks (which is 20 weeks using the age system in this bill) can survive with proper medical treatment.

Here is one child's story. Micah's story was profiled in the New York Times, and his mother Danielle Pickering wrote the following letter to share with Members of Congress as we turn to this important vote on the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act.

> By Danielle Pickering, Mom
>
> My son was not "viable". It was a word we were coming to hate. It all started the day my water broke, at 21 weeks. I was treated as if I had a Urinary Tract Infection, instead of a rupture of membranes. I was sent home with no instructions to do anything outside of my normal routine. I worked 8 hours a day in a warehouse, I cooked meals for my husband and myself, and I went to yard sales like normal, all with my water broken. One week later, at exactly 22 weeks, I started having small contractions and bleeding. My husband and I rushed to the Emergency Room, where they confirmed that my water was at less than 1 CM, and that I would be ambulanced to the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics for the remainder of my pregnancy.

When I was admitted my heart rate was high, baby's heart rate was high, and I was running a fever. They determined that since baby was not "viable" they would like to induce labor as they feared I had a life threatening infection. We called on everyone we knew to start praying, and within two hours I was now stable. We were then told that it was our decision to induce or to hold out and see what baby does, but they couldn't do anything at that time to stop labor. We decided to wait. We couldn't induce when we were sure this baby was not going to make it.

For the next three days we were told horrific statistics that no parent should ever have to face. We were told that our baby would not cry upon birth. We were told that he will likely be stillborn. We were told that, if by some miracle he survived he had a 95% chance of horrible life altering disabilities that would likely include not walking, not talking, not even eating on his own.

On the morning of 22 weeks and 4 days, Micah was born. He defied all odds and cried two times upon birth. This was music to this devastated mom's ears. I didn't get to see him. He was rushed away by a huge team of Doctors and Nurses dedicated to saving his life, as that was the choice we had made. You see, we were told that we didn't have to choose to intubate him and put him on a ventilator, but we had to do all we could to save this precious life. He had trusted his Mommy from conception to care and nourish him, and though my body was failing him, I wasn't going to! I was going to fight for him. I was going to advocate for him! I was going to be the voice of this tiny, fragile little boy who already I was so in love with, and hadn't even seen yet and thanks to an anterior placenta I hadn't even felt him kick or move yet.

Figure 1 Micah in the NICU. Photo courtesy of Danielle Pickering

The second I was able to meet Micah changed my life. He was so small. I didn't know what to expect. Would he look "normal"? Could I bond with this baby? Those questions were a mess in my head as I was wheeled into his room two hours after his birth. The sight I saw was a perfectly formed baby. Lots of tubes and monitors all set up to be an artificial womb to this baby born too soon. My husband and I stood there just staring at this beautiful little boy who we were told we couldn't hold as the skin was so sensitive it would hurt him. We were told we could press lightly on the skin so we each put our hand near him. HE reached up, and held our fingers. This was the strongest grasp I would ever feel. I never knew how strong a baby was until that moment! He had a powerful grip on our hands, and now our hearts.

Micah was about to spend the next 4 months in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. He was going to go through heart surgery, at 2 weeks old and just over a pound. He was going to hang on to life by a thread some days. There were days I couldn't leave his room. I slept on the floor next to his warmer bed many nights, because

my heart was so grieved for this tiny baby and I couldn't leave him alone. He was going to go through every ventilator they had available. He was going to be on Nitric Oxide to help his lungs. He would get scores of X-Rays and heel pricks. He was going to do something amazing-all because we were able to say "Yes, Please save our baby".

Here was this little baby who was on morphine for pain. He still had his eyes fused shut. You could see his chest vibrate from the ventilators. It was heartbreaking. Here was a boy who we would see get to take his first sneeze. His first smile. We would get to see the hiccups, from the outside. We would watch his eyes slowly unfuse. We would watch his hair grow in and we would watch his body develop. It was indescribably the most joyful time of our life.

We knew the Lord had a plan for Micah. Our prayer to God from early on was that Micah's life, Micah's story, and Micah's example would help others, and could somehow save other babies born too soon. We didn't know what the will for Micah was, but we do now. It was to be a voice for all those other babies. We didn't understand at the time that Micah was right on time, but now we do. Until you are faced with a situation like this, you cannot grasp the intensity that will become every decision. You can read every doctor report, you can get advice from everyone. You can be knowledgeable on every part of prematurity, but that does not change the fact that Micah was just as much full of life at 22.4 weeks as he now is at almost 3 years old. Every scary moment has been worth it. Every doctor visit, every oxygen tank we went through, every middle of the night phone call from Neonatologists, was worth it. We now have a very perfect almost 3 year old we get to call son, when we were preparing for empty arms. Our hearts are full because we chose to give him a chance at life.

Every life is precious and deserving of care. Micah's fragile beginning at 22.4 weeks (about 20 weeks using the dating system in H.R. 36) reveals the humanity of the unborn children we will be voting to protect this week. Please join me in supporting the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act (H.R. 36).

Sincerely,

Vicky Hartzler

Vicky Hartzler
Member of Congress