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## Caring for the whole life and the whole woman is hard, but right

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In 2018, there were [619,591 abortions](#). Each involved a life lost. Each involved a woman facing a difficult decision under disparate circumstances that none of us should judge. These are predominantly women of color, women without means, women without a loving spouse, women who face unimaginable struggles and deserve our compassion and support.

But, instead, we have raised generations to believe that abortion is the only option we can offer these women. Generations that substitute abortion for the hard work of helping these women and their children find a way to a better future. It is easier for society to tell them to dispose of their poor babies. Voices are muted when the time is now for the hard and challenging debate about ways society can help these mothers and their children.

Almost 22 million children under the age of 21 have a parent, usually a father, that does not live in their household. Just over 30 percent of them live in poverty. In only about half of these families does the custodial parent have a legal or informal child support agreement, and only 70 percent received some payment of support.

According to the U.S. Census, parents were owed \$30 billion in child support in 2017, but only 62.2 percent was paid, averaging \$3,431 per custodial parent for the year. Under such circumstances, it is easy to understand why an impoverished mother facing an unplanned pregnancy might consider abortion. It is even easier to understand how children raised in these circumstances might grow up to think there is no other way to live their adult lives.

But, as a society, we should not promote abortion as the only answer to the challenges these women and their children face. We should be talking about and taking action to support them. Kudos to the 2,700 pregnancy help centers across the country who provided nearly \$270 million in assistance to 2 million people in 2019 alone and to the millions of individuals who donate their time and money as well.

It is far harder to hold someone's hand through pregnancy, to help them file the paperwork to get their new child food and medical assistance, to connect them with education and job training, to get them out of an abusive home than to tell them there is

no life within them deserving of protection. It is hard, but it is courageous, compassionate, and right.

For policymakers, passing laws that require fathers carry their equal share of the financial needs of childbearing and child-caring is hard, but right. Even just the discussion requires us to face difficult truths about sexuality, abuse and more. It requires us to find compromises in our honest philosophical differences about the role of government, the need for personal responsibility and about how and why we sacrifice our personal interests for others. But we need to do this. If we can get past seeing everything through the filter of abortion, we can find there is real comity.

Gov. [Bob Casey](#), a prominent pro-life Democrat, was known for his maxim that family formation should be on par with capital formation. During his tenure, Pennsylvania became the top state for child support enforcement. But this is not the exclusive domain of Democrats. The Republican Party Platform affirms “our moral obligation to assist, rather than penalize, women who face an unplanned pregnancy.” At the urging of then-Treasurer Lynn Fitch, the platform that stands today supports “legislation that requires financial responsibility for the child be equally borne by both the mother and father.”

Caring for the least among us is part of what makes us human. It is woven into the tapestry of the American ethos. We have failed at times, and these are reminders that our humanity and our American ideals are imperfect. But we should celebrate that as a people we continue to correct injustice where we see it, even if we do so slowly and in flawed ways. Our failure to embrace the dignity of life is an injustice that demands our attention.

In the fifty years since *Roe v Wade*, we have raised whole generations to devalue the lives of those who cannot speak for themselves, those who are in the greatest need of our care and protection. This is the slow and steady unraveling of that rich American tapestry. If we do not stand up for the least among us, if we allow this undeserved violence against the most vulnerable, we risk losing our place as a beacon of hope.

As women, we do not share a common story. One of us is a black Democrat woman from Michigan, the other a white Republican woman raised in rural Mississippi. We are coming together to support the whole life and the whole woman. We are committed to working together and finding more allies to help us empower women, as we promote life. Some see this as hard, but we know it is right.

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