

Congresswoman

Melissa Hart

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HART'S UNBORN VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE ACT BECOMES LAW

WASHINGTON—President Bush today signed into law Congresswoman Melissa Hart's bill, the Unborn Victims of Violence/Laci and Conner's Law. Hart, some of her House and Senate colleagues, as well as families of victims of criminal violence including Sharon Rocha, Laci Peterson's mother, attended the signing.

At the ceremony, Bush said, "The Unborn Victims of Violence Act provides that, under federal law, any person who causes death or injury to a child in the womb shall be charged with a separate offense, in addition to any charges relating to the mother. As of today, the law of our nation will acknowledge the plain fact that crimes of violence against a pregnant woman often have two victims. And therefore, in those cases, there are two offenses to be punished. Under this law, those who direct violence toward a pregnant woman will answer for the full extent of the harm they have done, and for all the crimes they have committed."

Hart said of her bill becoming law:

"President Bush's signature on 'Laci and Conner's Law' will close a gap that has existed in federal law for too long. I am grateful that we were able to get this done--to bring to justice those who inflict terrible pain and loss on families around the nation."

"Too many families, the Peterson family, the Lyons family, the Marciniak family to name but a few, have told Congress what the real loss is in victimization of pregnant women and their unborn children. We cannot restore their loss, but it is time we respect the lives of the

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children, grandchildren, brothers, and sisters as well as those of the women bringing them into the world. Also, it is overdue to bring some sense of closure and justice to the families who suffer the injury and loss caused by this violence.”

“Recent multi-state studies have uncovered a disturbing statistic: one quarter of the pregnant women who die are victims of homicide. Pregnant women have become targets, and sadly, the unborn child is often what motivates the attack on the pregnant woman. Such attacks on pregnant women are attacks on two individuals – the mother and her baby. The law must respect the life of the mother and the child, and allow prosecution for the actual crimes.”

“Finally an individual who commits a federal crime of violence against a pregnant woman can be charged for killing or injuring the woman's unborn child. Twenty-nine states have passed laws similar to Laci and Conner’s Law to address this injustice. Today this gap in federal law has been corrected,” Hart concluded.

The bill passed the House of Representatives on February 26th by a bipartisan vote of 254 to 163. It passed the Senate on March 25th by a vote of 61 to 38.

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