

KB 97

# Editorial

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## in our opinion

EDITORIAL

### A safe haven

#### AMENDMENTS COULD SAVE THE LIVES OF UTAH CHILDREN

A simple amendment designed to save the lives of vulnerable Utah infants deserves a positive reception at the Legislature and a concerted education effort around the state.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Patrice Arent, D-Millcreek, would amend Utah's safe haven law, which hasn't been updated since she first shepherded it through the legislative process in 2001. The law allows a parent to relinquish a newborn baby at a hospital with no questions asked within a 72-hour time frame. The amendment would expand the time limit to 30 days, among other things.

That makes sense. Some mothers spend all of 72 hours in the hospital only to return home to a troubling situation. Others may face dire circumstances days after giving birth and rush to place their baby in an unsafe condition.

From an outside view, relinquishing an infant seems heart-breaking, but no one can truly understand the calculus of a parent in crisis, and the option should be seen as a far better alternative to abortion or leaving a baby to languish in a dumpster — a tragedy that is unfortunately common.

Two decades ago, when Utah first debated a safe haven bill, the Deseret News recounted the stories of a days-old baby found dead in a dresser drawer, a child wrapped in a garbage sack and left in a park, a baby who drowned in a river and another who was left at a miniature golf course.

And reports of similar tales trickle in at a steady drip. In 2014, a Utah mother admitted to killing six of her children after giving birth to them and storing their bodies in a bag in the garage.

Society may never know what compels a parent to abandon a baby, and whether a more robust safe haven law would have helped the children in these scenarios is impossible to answer. Still, ensuring each child has a pathway to safety is paramount. Once a parent anonymously hands over an infant to a hospital, staff members contact the Division of Child and Family Services, which then assumes responsibility for the child's care and works to place it in a good home.

In Utah, it's hard to quantify how many children have been affected by the law, but Arent is confident it saves lives every year. She also added that observations from other states make it clear that expanding the drop-off time frame will protect even more children.

Additionally, Arent says, the law works in unintended, yet positive, ways. Some women who want to keep their babies call the 24-hour hotline for fear that they don't have the financial resources to do so. They are then provided resources to help them take appropriate steps.

A challenge, though, is getting the word out to mothers in need. For this, Arent's bill seeks \$50,000 from the state for educational purposes: Billboards, pamphlets and better training for doctors, nurses and first responders should help efforts to reach at-risk mothers — typically unwed women who have kept their pregnancy a secret and are ashamed of the child.

That seems a pittance to pay for the gift of life, especially when other states spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on similar campaigns. Lawmakers should support the bill and help Utah protect its most defenseless children.

HB 97



**Revised Fiscal Note**  
**H.B. 97 1st Sub. (Buff)**  
 2020 General Session  
 Newborn Safe Haven Amendments  
 by Arent, P. (Arent, Patrice.)



**General, Education, and Uniform School Funds**

JR4-5-101

	Ongoing	One-time	Total
Net GF/EF/USF (rev.-exp.)	\$(68,000)	\$0	\$(68,000)

**State Government**

UCA 36-12-13(2)(b)

Revenues	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
Federal Funds	\$0	\$14,500	\$14,500
Total Revenues	\$0	\$14,500	\$14,500

Enactment of this legislation may bring in additional federal funds of \$14,500 ongoing beginning in FY 2021.

Expenditures	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
General Fund	\$0	\$68,000	\$68,000
Federal Funds	\$0	\$14,500	\$14,500
Total Expenditures	\$0	\$82,500	\$82,500

This legislation appropriates \$50,000 ongoing General Fund to the Department of Health for training and education. Additionally, enactment of this legislation may cost the State ongoing \$18,000 General Fund and \$14,500 federal funds beginning in FY 2021 to annually serve four more relinquished newborns.

	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022
<b>Net All Funds</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$(68,000)</b>	<b>\$(68,000)</b>

**Local Government**

UCA 36-12-13(2)(c)

Enactment of this legislation likely will not result in direct, measurable costs for local governments.

**Individuals & Businesses**

UCA 36-12-13(2)(d)

Enactment of this legislation likely will not result in direct expenditures from tax or fee changes for Utah residents and businesses.

**Regulatory Impact**

UCA 36-12-13(2)(e)

Enactment of this legislation likely will not change the regulatory burden for Utah residents or businesses.

H.B. 97 1st Sub. (Buff)