

Erin's Story and Reason for Working towards The No Heartbeat Act:

On March 29th 2004, I was nine months pregnant with a kicking healthy baby boy. His nursery was complete. We had decided on his name, and we were waiting for him to join our family of three. However, the next day, on March 30th 2004, after 12 hours of labor, James Lincoln Dickerson was born still. He was 6.4lbs and 21 inches long, with thick curly brown hair, chubby cheeks, his daddy's cleft chin, and perfect in every way. After extensive testing of James and of me, we were left with no answer as to why he died. I had given birth, and instead of leaving the hospital with our new son, I was wheeled out a side door of the hospital, as if nothing had happened.

However, there was no escaping the reality that something had happened. When I came home from the hospital I sat in my son's cowboy nursery and sobbed. My heart was broken. Our dreams for this boy were shattered so suddenly, and I had nothing to show for any of it, except his empty nursery. Then I learned I could get a fetal death certificate from Vital Statistics. After thinking about it I realized that I didn't really want a piece of paper that only recognized my son as a fetus, and only focused on his death. Then I thought that if I can get a death certificate, then they must have certificates that say he was born. I researched on the Internet and discovered that there were many states that have Certificates of Birth Resulting in Stillbirth for stillborn babies, but unfortunately, I did not live in one of those states. Georgia will only recognize my son's death.

I remember thinking that day that I wanted a Certificate of Birth Resulting in Stillbirth for James. At that time, my grief was so consuming that I didn't consider that a day would come where I could do something to honor James, and help other grieving parents heal. In the four years since James' death, I have met countless other grieving moms and dads through Share Atlanta, a pregnancy and early infant loss support group. I began to understand that these families shared not only my grief, but the desire to have their precious baby recognized and their experience validated. Our babies were born, and all we want is a certificate that recognizes their birth, not just their death. I want a Certificate of Birth Resulting in Stillbirth as tangible proof that this child who forever changed me, was real, and was here if only for a short time. When the stories of the impact his short life had on us have left the earth with us, his place in our family's history will remain as a part of the permanent record.

Even though nothing can bring these children back to us, you have the power to offer recognition, validation, and compassion just by passing the No Heartbeat Act. Please make Certificates of Birth Resulting in Stillbirth available as a step toward healing to Georgia families grieving the loss of their baby.