

Surrogate parenting issue: Is it 'selling flesh?'

Tim Richard
staff writer

On one point the foes and even some friends of surrogate parenthood agree: They like the growing practice of a childless couple paying big money — perhaps \$500 — to a woman to bear the husband's child by artificial insemination.

A flesh market," said Chris Spurr, a Birmingham woman who helps adopted people research on their parentage. She favors state Bill 63, which would prohibit surrogate parenting.

The issue of money becomes paramount, admitted state Sen. Basil Brown, Highland Park, who favors allowing surrogate parenting but is bothered by the exchange of money.

The system is not unlike the slave trade, he said. Washburn Probate Judge John Campbell, who denounced surrogate parenting as "commercializing the creation of life."



Sen. Patrick McCollough
regulations likely

Two couples stoutly defended the practice during a hearing last week of the State Committee on Health and Social Services on the campus of Henry Ford Community College in Dearborn.

Michael D. Ramirez, who gave a business address on Research Drive in Farmington Hills, and his wife called the practice "rent-a-mom" in the surrogate mother's womb.

Ramirez said they are paying \$500 to a woman they introduced only as "Mrs. B," and her husband Brian, for Kathy's son Michael Ramirez's child.

That \$10,000 amounts to \$250 a week," Ramirez said.

Kathy's putting her life on the line. I know she earned it," added Mrs. Ramirez.

And Kathy, a tall, attractive blonde woman in the early stage of pregnancy, added, "I'm not giving away my child. I'm giving Michael his."

Mrs. Ramirez said the surrogate parenting had been carefully planned. "We interviewed each other. They asked us, 'How do you feel about discipline? Do you drink? Do you smoke?' Anybody who says this is easy is wrong."

"I HAVE A child of my own by a previous marriage," said Kathy, clutching Brian's hand, "and no one screened my first husband before we were married."

"We're really proud of what we're doing, that we can help the Ramirezes," added Ramirez. "We're putting together a scrapbook for the child" — a document that will tell the child about Kathy's role and identity.

SB 63, by state Sen. Connie Binsfeld, R-Troy, is unlikely to be reported out of committee. Even if fellow Republican Alan Roysen of DeWitt supports her, the bill is opposed by committee chairman Patrick McCollough, D-Dearborn, Joseph Conroy, Flint, and probably by Jackie Vaughan, D-Detroit.

The Senate Judiciary Committee, headed by opponent Basil Brown, is also likely to have a crack at SB 63.

MORE LIKELY to pass, McCollough said in an interview after the hearing, is a bill by Rep. Richard Fitzpatrick, D-Battle Creek, to regulate surrogate parenting.

Fitzpatrick's bill would prohibit paying a woman to be the surrogate mother. The third-term lawmaker told McCollough's committee his bill would also:

- Require screening of the biological father and his wife by a family counselor.
- Guarantee the child all the rights of an adopted child.

exchange. Those for it (outlawing surrogate parenting) had no financial gain."

Her remark apparently was aimed at Dearborn attorney Noel P. Keane, who helped negotiate surrogate agreements. Keane testified he knows of 25 surrogate births "in my particular group" — five in the first five years of the practice, 24 in the last two years.

"There have been no abortions and no known defects," Keane added.

To the charge that surrogate motherhood was "dehumanizing," Keane replied that "week after week of going to fertility clinics" was worse.

The U.S. Supreme Court, he said, has ruled the right to bear a child is individual — that is, a man has a right to have a child even if his wife is infertile.

PERSONS WHO had been adopted as youths were strongly in favor of Binsfeld's bill.

Chris Spurr, the Birmingham woman, said her adoptive parents were divorced. Her mother remarried when Chris was 8 and had three of her own children. Spurr said their family was a separate family unit. "I was someone else's rejection."

Although she supported Binsfeld's bill, Spurr advocated many of the regulations in the forthcoming Fitzpatrick bill, such as psychological testing of the father.

Of the surrogate mothers she said, "They will never be able to forget the child they sold. They will be sick with worry every time they read a child dies and wonder if it was theirs."

- Provide for the child's care if the father dies prior to the birth.
- Guarantee no state funds would be used in support of surrogate parenting.
- "If we make it illegal," Fitzpatrick said, "it will go underground."
- Unlike such crimes as child abuse and robbery, he added, surrogate parenting is "morally neutral and should not be forced underground."

CLEARLY UNHAPPY with the hearing was Sen. Binsfeld, SB 63's sponsor. "The testimony against it was clearly orchestrated by people who were involved in a financial

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