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**PATRICK TESTIN**  
STATE SENATOR

Op-Ed: Shield the Vulnerable Act Seeks to End Discriminatory Abortion

A few months after I took office in 2017, a newspaper article caught my eye - Iceland was on the verge of eradicating Down syndrome. My interest turned to concern and then to sadness as I read the story. The article detailed how the country had achieved a desirable result – the near eradication of the condition- by taking an ethically objectionable path. Icelanders have used selective abortion to eliminate children who could possibly be born with the chromosomal abnormality, even though, as the article pointed out, people born with the condition can often “...live full, healthy lives, with an average lifespan of around 60 years.”

This isn't the only example of certain populations being targeted. In some cultures where male children are valued more highly than female children, abortion is used as a tool of sex discrimination. The United Nations Populations Fund has recognized this as a global problem, citing the claim that by 2020, 142 million women will have been denied the ability to live simply because of their sex. There have also been instances where race has been a factor in the decision to abort.

Regardless of how one might feel about the use of abortion as birth control (and I do oppose it), I would hope that people from all walks of life can come together against using abortion as a tool of discrimination. That's why I've worked with Representative Barbara Dittich (Oconomowoc) to introduce the Shield the Vulnerable Act. This bill is a proactive move to say that in Wisconsin, these practices will not be tolerated and that the characteristics of a child are not a valid reason to terminate a pregnancy. Under this bill, physicians will be required to notify their patients of this and are prohibited from performing an abortion if they believe a woman is seeking one for those reasons.

As a society, we've made great strides in recent decades toward recognizing the value and contributions of all individuals – regardless of sex, race, or ability. Governor Evers recently signed a bill banning a word that is offensive to individuals with certain handicaps. I agree with the Governor's action – and I think we need to take further substantive action to affirm the dignity of all individuals. Let's end the practice of discriminatory abortion.