

**Testimony for Public Hearing  
Committee on Public Health  
March 20, 2018**

Abby  
Simsbury

**HB 5416 AN ACT CONCERNING DECEPTIVE PRACTICES OF LIMITED SERVICES  
PREGNANCY CENTERS**

Representative Steinberg, Senator Gerratana, Senator Somers, and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee,

My name is Abby and I live in Simsbury. I testify in strong support of H.B. 5416 An Act Concerning Deceptive Advertising Practices of Limited Services Pregnancy Centers.

Last year, I visited a crisis pregnancy center in Western Connecticut. For this crisis pregnancy center, some of the results from an online search of "abortion waterbury" say "Abortion and your health. Thinking about pregnancy or abortion? Facing an unplanned pregnancy but not sure about abortion? We can help you find answers." Especially when someone is unsure and nervous about where to go, these ads are very overwhelming. At the time of this visit I was volunteering my time to help NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut with research about these centers. Our goal was to get a better look at how this crisis pregnancy center actually operates and what information, or lack thereof, they give to women about pregnancy and their options. It's very easy to be deceived by these centers-- you can find their ads on buses, billboards, and especially while searching online.

When I called to make an appointment, I was directly connected to the center's weekend hotline. The woman answering the phone was very vague and didn't ask many questions. She just told me I could come in for a pregnancy test and "talk through my options." She didn't say much about what was offered there but on the website it said "Client Services, Pregnancy Information, Pregnancy Choices, Sexual Health, Abortion & Health Risks." I could see how someone would be unsure.

I arrived at the crisis pregnancy center with a friend who came to support me. We were instructed to come to the back door and were invited in by a woman. We walked through the kitchen, with lots of religious pictures and decorations. At this point, the woman asked for my support person to stay in the kitchen while we talked. I emphasized that I was scared and wanted my friend with me. We went back and forth again, but eventually she agreed to let me have my support person come with me into a living room with a desk that the woman sat behind. While I took a pregnancy test, she talked to my friend and got more information about me and the situation. I told her that I was currently single, and that the father did not know about the pregnancy. My friend added that she did not approve of him, and the woman scoffed and said, "Well, you probably should have figured that out before you got into bed with him, huh?" I

was shocked she would say something like that during what was supposed to be a counseling session.

When the test came back positive, she told me about the joys of motherhood, even though I was clearly distressed, and pulled out a few dolls that were supposed to be the size of a fetus at 8 weeks and said "These babies are what your baby looks like right now." The dolls she pulled out were clearly bigger and more detailed than an actual fetus at 8 weeks. I kept saying, "I do not want to be pregnant. I can't have a baby." She said that she would only talk to me about having the baby and adoption. She never said the word abortion and told me that if that's what I decided to do, I'd have to live with my decision for the rest of my life and would disappoint my family if I made the wrong choice. She was very shameful and told me to think about what my grandparents would think about my decision. At some point during the conversation, the woman began to direct all conversation to my friend instead of talking to me or answering my questions. She said to my friend, "Clearly she's too overwhelmed by this news to think straight or absorb anything, so I'll just talk to you." I felt unheard and patronized by the whole experience, like I was only a body, not a whole person.

We left with lots of brochures on parenting and adoption, as well as a list of catholic hospitals and doctors offices they referred to. The woman told my support person to call if I needed more support or wanted to be put in touch with any of their parenting programs or adoption services.

After this experience, I feel horrified knowing that women facing unintended pregnancy might come to this crisis pregnancy center seeking nonjudgemental support and accurate information. Instead, it was my experience that women receive biased, inaccurate, and oftentimes demeaning counseling. If I was a woman in that situation, I could have easily believed what the woman told me. If a woman is specifically looking for information about abortion or reproductive healthcare I would be scared about what is told to her in this crisis pregnancy center. When someone is seeking all-options counseling from a legitimate clinic, they shouldn't have to go through this confusion and shame. They should be able to easily find the kind of care they are looking for.

In conclusion, I strongly support H.B. 5416 to limit the deceptive advertising practices of crisis pregnancy centers in our state. From my experience it is very confusing what services people are able to get at crisis pregnancy centers, and I believe truth an advertising should be a priority. I hope the committee moves forward with H.B. 5416.

Thank you for your time.

Abby