

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

**Elizabeth Hitzel
155 Pearl Street
Second Floor
Middletown, CT 06457**

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 Elizabeth Hitzel and I live in Middletown, Connecticut. I testify in strong support of H.B. 5416 An Act Concerning Deceptive Advertising Practices of Limited Services Pregnancy Centers.

I visited a crisis pregnancy center in the Greater Hartford area. I went to the center to assist NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut in researching crisis pregnancy centers. Our goal was to understand how this organization presents itself to women who believe they are pregnant and the services that they provide. I see billboards for this center and others like it routinely. They say, "Pregnant? Scared? Need help?" Sometimes the ads are on the backs of buses. Other times they are online. If you Google the words "abortion Connecticut" the first ads that come up in your search say "Abortion- Pregnant & Afraid?" I wouldn't have known what was on the other end of that website and phone number.

I called and made an appointment at the crisis pregnancy center. They didn't tell me much on the phone, just to come in for a pregnancy test. I brought a close friend with me and after finding the small waiting room we were greeted by a woman who asked us to wait for a few minutes. We looked around the room as we waited and it looked like the waiting room of a medical office. There were pictures of children everywhere, pamphlets with misleading information about pregnancy, and little plastic dolls made to look like fetuses. After waiting she came out and refused to let my friend join me for the appointment even after I requested that she come for emotional support. We started the appointment and she knew nothing more about me other than my first name and did not ask me for any proof of identification or health insurance.

I told her that I wasn't sure if I was pregnant. After discussing her personal views toward motherhood and pulling out a calendar to determine how long it had been since my last period, she said I could take a pregnancy test to see if I were pregnant. She had me wait again in the waiting room and when she came out with the pregnancy test she was dressed in a white lab coat. I took the test and the results read as positive. She asked me what I planned to do. I explained to her that I wasn't sure I wanted to continue the pregnancy and she recommended adoption. I told her I feared medical complications that can occur during pregnancy and asked about the option of abortion. Instead of answering any of my questions with medically accurate information, she brushed off my concerns, said that she would not discuss abortion, and gave me a copy of What to Expect When You're Expecting.

After this experience I fear for women in Connecticut who come to this organization expecting to receive accurate information about a full range of pregnancy options from a medical professional and instead are met with a volunteer who is professing nothing other than their personal opinion. Throughout the experience, from the Google search, the ads on the buses, the waiting room, and the white lab coat, I was made to believe I was seeking care from a medical clinic. I'm not sure I would have known otherwise. I worry that these organizations will be able to continue to mislead women and misrepresent what they actually offer.

This bill is important, because it will require that organizations do nothing more than be honest about the services that they offer. Putting personal beliefs surrounding abortion aside I hope we can agree that all women deserve full transparency when we are making personal decisions regarding our health and futures.

In conclusion, I strongly support H.B. 5416 to limit the deceptive advertising practices of crisis pregnancy centers in our state. No woman should have to go through all this confusion just to find a healthcare provider. I urge the committee to move forward with H.B. 5416.

Thank you,
Elizabeth Hitzel