

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

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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 Rev. Erica Richmond and I live in West Hartford. I testify in strong support of H.B. 5416 An Act Concerning Deceptive Advertising Practices of Limited Services Pregnancy Centers.

I am here today as a minister and a healthcare professional. I am a chaplain at Hartford Hospital. Day in and day out I minister to those in tender and raw situations. As a spiritual leader and a hospital employee, I know first hand how important it is that healthcare embodies trust, integrity, and patient safety. Without these guiding principles, patients, who are already fearful and vulnerable, are at greater risk. Crisis Pregnancy Centers go against the sacred bond between that should exist between every patient seeking counsel and support.

In my as the palliative care chaplain, I serve the in-patient oncology unit, the medical ICU, and the Labor and Delivery unit. On the Labor and Delivery unit I am often called to sit with people during times of unbearable loss. Mourning pregnancy or infant loss at a bedside does not negate my commitment to being pro-choice. When I walk into a room, I am called to meet a patient where she is at; I am not there for judgment. I am there as a safe, trusted source of spiritual comfort and accompaniment.

As a religious leader in this ever-changing and challenging world, I am called to sit with nuance. This issue of abortion and choice is one that requires us to acknowledge and honor complexity. To know that 73% of women who have abortions are religiously affiliated. Nearly one in three women will have an abortion in her lifetime. That a person might be married, partnered, or single. That a person might have a hundred reasons to seek out a trust healthcare professional and ask questions and to do what is best for her. A woman's body and her self-understanding is what is holy, not what we prescribe to her experience. Crisis Pregnancy Centers do the opposite; they push an agenda at the expense of women. They go against the very foundation of what healthcare should be: places of safety and patient-centered care. Regardless of our beliefs

on this issue, at the very least, we should require that all organizations are transparent, honest, and free of manipulative practices.

As a chaplain it is my job to listen to stories. I am called to be a witness. As a fellow pastor said, it is our job to say, "I am here if you need me." This is the job of all people in helping professions, especially those of us connected to healthcare. To be available to answer questions, to provide guidance, and help people make the best decisions for themselves. When crisis pregnancy centers disguise themselves as medical clinics, they are going against this ethos. Lying to women who seek out medical advice goes against everything an open and free society seeks to do. CPCs create a climate of fear and violence. And we are better than that. We are here to hold and honor complexity. Our state and our healthcare systems should be champions of "here if you need us." We are here without judgment, without agenda, and without personal bias. This is what we are called to do.

In conclusion, I strongly support H.B. 5416 to limit the deceptive advertising practices of crisis pregnancy centers in our state. I urge the committee to move forward with H.B. 5416.

Thank you for your time.
Yours in Service,
Rev. Erica