



The Women's Centers

Providing compassionate abortion and reproductive health services

Atlanta Women's Center, Cherry Hill Women's Center, Hartford GYN Center,
Delaware County Women's Center, and Philadelphia Women's Center

March 19, 2018

Chairpersons Gerratana, Somers, and Steinberg, and Committee Members
Public Health Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3000
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: Written Testimony Regarding House Bill 5416

Dear Chairpersons Gerratana, Somers, and Steinberg, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of House Bill 5416.

My name is Roxanne Sutocky and I am the Regional Director of Community Engagement for The Women's Centers. We provide compassionate abortion care and women's reproductive health services to patients in Georgia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and here in Connecticut at Hartford GYN Center. Hartford GYN Center is a certified member of the National Abortion Federation and a member of the Abortion Care Network. Our certification requires a commitment to excellent patient care, commendable safety records, continually educated medical staff, modern medical equipment, and high standard policies and procedures. We take this commitment very seriously, as we know our patients are trusting us with their well-being and their very lives.

I strongly urge you to pass House Bill 5416, which would help protect pregnant women from false and misleading advertising meant to delay or prevent their access to abortion care. Our commitment to our patients' well-being means that we would never deceive patients in order to keep them from accessing the care they seek. Fake women's health centers, on the other hand, go out of their way to do exactly that. They open up next door to abortion clinics, they mimic the appearance and names of abortion clinics, and they place advertisements that make it look like they offer the full range of family planning services when they do not, all in the name of misleading patients.

Patients deserve better than to be subjected to these fallacious practices; their health depends on it. Abortion is a time-sensitive procedure, and a delay in access can mean a patient is unable to get care at all, and will be forced to carry a pregnancy to term. And although abortion is very safe throughout pregnancy, the risks do increase as gestation proceeds. By deceptively diverting patients seeking health care through their doors, fake women's health centers cause unnecessary delays that needlessly imperil a patient's health. We have cared for countless patients that have experienced delays in accessing their abortion care due to traveling to the wrong office due to confusing ads or due to misleading or false information about their gestation from a fake clinic:

- Often, patients seeking the Medical Abortion by Pill scan past the gestational limit for that care. The Medication Abortion by Pill is offered until the 10th week in pregnancy. Many pregnancy people do not know they are pregnant until they are 5-6 weeks and even small delays have pushed this care out of reach of many.
- Patients seeking surgical termination of pregnancy in the second trimester scan too far to access a surgical termination of pregnancy with our Centers at all after delays throughout

Our Mission: We provide compassionate abortion care and reproductive health services, inspired by our belief in the autonomy of the individual, and our commitment to strengthening communities and building a better future. We strive for excellence in healthcare provision, and we work for reproductive rights and social change.

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pregnancy. This means patients in need can be referred to one of a handful of providers scattered around the country that provide care in the third trimester or pregnancy. The cost and travel associated with that procedure makes it impossible for many to access, and many patients who scan too far for their procedures in our Centers have to carry their pregnancy to term against their wishes.

Our patients rely on us to provide them with high-quality care and the evidence-based information and resources they need to be able to make personal decisions about their pregnancies. Establishing a trusting relationship with our patients is a crucial part of this provision of care. Unfortunately, the deceptive advertising practices employed by fake women's health centers do a great deal to undermine the patient-provider relationship, making it more difficult for pregnant women to access the care they need.

One example of this breakdown of patient and provider relationship happened recently when 21 year old Hartford resident named Shania scheduled an appointment with Hartford GYN Center to seek care for an unplanned pregnancy. On her way to her appointment, Shania and her mother were instructed to enter Hartford Women's Center by one of the Crisis Pregnancy Center employees. The CPC employee told them to "come in here" and they thought they were at the right facility due to the similar name and signage that says "abortion." After entering the CPC, Shania was told that if she had an abortion, she would be "sinning" and that she "might not make it out alive." Shania and her mother left the office after being told, "There is no abortion Center here." With the help of Hartford GYN Center volunteers, Shania and her mother were able to find their way to Shania's initial appointment. Shania entered Hartford GYN Center and reported feeling "scared" and a majority of the appointment involved talking about the experience, explaining that the person she talked to was not a medical professional, identifying misinformation and providing factual information. When Shania decided to seek care in her pregnancy from Hartford GYN Center, she expected unbiased, non-coercive pregnancy counseling and abortion care from medical professionals, but instead she was misled and confronted with lies and shame.

Patients seeking health care rely on their providers to give them high-quality, evidence-based information and services. They are placing their well-being in the hands of strangers, trusting that we are well-trained, licensed providers who are equipped to tell them everything they need to know in order to make the decisions that are best for them. By engaging in deceptive, misleading advertising practices, fake women's health centers attempt to exploit that trust, and thereby keep patients from accessing abortion care. The women of Connecticut deserve better, and I strongly encourage you to help ensure they get it by passing House Bill 5416.

*Patient names have been changed to protect their privacy.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Roxanne Sutocky
Regional Director of Community Engagement

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