

Dear members of the Public Health Committee,

Please vote no on S.B. No. 835

The bill says that it is “AN ACT CONCERNING DECEPTIVE ADVERTISING PRACTICES OF LIMITED SERVICES PREGNANCY CENTERS.” That makes it sound like there has been a significant problem with deceptive advertising by pregnancy centers. It turns out there is no problem at all and never has been. There has never been a formal complaint from a client claiming they were deceived by any pregnancy center in Connecticut.

Since there have never been complaints filed, how would “deceptive” advertising be handled were this bill to be passed? That is a major problem; the bill doesn’t specify what would be considered deceptive but gives absolute power to the Attorney General (AG) to make that determination, no complaint necessary. The current AG said that a statement on one of the pregnancy center websites stating, “pregnant? We can help,” was deceptive. How is that deceptive? That is exactly what pregnancy centers do; they provide help to pregnant women and their families.

As the Nurse Manager at Care Net of Southeastern Connecticut for seven years I can tell you that our services have been critically needed, especially in the last year and we have stayed safely open to provide help through it all. There are women who come to us because they can’t even afford to purchase a pregnancy test kit. Our medical personnel perform pregnancy tests and administer ultrasounds to establish gestational age and viability. Our trained staff helps clients access health insurance or emergency funds for health care, they help them get doctor’s appointments, as well as make referrals to social service agencies. Our clients have access to our birthing classes, parenting classes and material assistance like cribs, car seats, formula, diapers and other baby items. Our center also offers STI testing to anyone. All our services are at no charge to the client or to taxpayers and are completely confidential.

We frequently have clients who seek out our services when they are unsure of what they want to do about their pregnancy. Many of those women choose us because they have been referred by a friend who knows they will receive accurate, objective information about all their options, not just the option we would make money off of, because we have no financial stake in their decision.

We help them make an informed decision and provide support for them, no matter what choice they make. Would a friend send them to a place where they would be deceived?

This bill is certainly not in the best interest of women because its intent is to make it harder for women to find and access the services of these centers. The fact that this legislation only applies to facilities that do not perform or refer for abortions is proof that this is “viewpoint discrimination,” and like other places that have tried to implement such restrictions, it will never hold up in court and could end up costing the citizens of Connecticut millions of dollars.

Furthermore, many mistruths have been told about Pregnancy Resource Centers (PRCs) and I would like to address a few of them.

It has been alleged that pregnancy resource centers are “fake medical clinics.” There is nothing fake about us. Any center that performs medical procedures, such as ultrasound, has a Connecticut licensed physician as their Medical Director. At centers where ultrasounds are performed, they are done by either a physician, a Registered Diagnostic Medical Sonographer (RDMS) or an RN who has received special training and certification to perform limited obstetrical ultrasounds. Ultrasounds performed by the RDMS or RN are all reviewed by the Medical Director.

They have also claimed that PRCs are not legitimate because they aren’t licensed medical facilities. The state of Connecticut does not require any special license for these centers. They work under the license of their medical director. The centers that perform medical tests (pregnancy & STI) have a CLIA waiver. The center in New London has taken the extra step of becoming a licensed medical facility but even the licensing agency said that it wasn’t required. This center had already implemented such high medical standards that qualifying for this license did not require any changes in what they were already doing. All centers that are part of the Connecticut Pregnancy Care Coalition also adhere to the highest medical standards because we feel we have a moral and ethical obligation to do so, even if it is not required by the state.

It has also been alleged that, because we do not fall under HIPAA, patients cannot expect that pregnancy centers would maintain their privacy. That is ridiculous.

Most people are not aware that the Healthcare Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) was signed into law in 1996 and was created to “improve the portability and accountability of health insurance coverage” for employees between jobs. Clinics only fall under the requirements of HIPAA if they bill insurance for their services, and we do not. Maintaining patient privacy is a separate issue that has been something all medical professionals have adhered to long before HIPAA was passed. Yes, our clients have always been able to depend on us to maintain their privacy and they always will be, as many can and have personally attested to.

This is a bad bill for so many reasons:

- There is no demonstrated need for it.
- Implementation of this legislation is not triggered by someone making a complaint but gives absolute power to the state attorney general to decide what they think is deceptive and then tell the centers what they must say instead. (This is the same AG who said “Pregnant, we can help” was deceptive.)
- Nowhere in this bill is there any recourse allowed for the center to contest what the AG has decided they have to say and do.
- The bill does not define “deceptive advertising” so there is no objective standard to measure PRCs against. The AG alone gets to decide.
- Every other state and city (including Hartford) that has tried to implement similar legislation has lost in court and some have had to pay millions in court and attorney’s fees.

Please do not limit women’s choices. Vote no on S.B No. 835

Thank you,
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Care Net Pregnancy Resource Center of SECT