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2-8-20

Dear members of the Public Health Committee,

My name is Christina Bennett and I am the Communications Director for the Family Institute of Connecticut. This letter serves to voice my strong opposition to raised bill S.B. 835, An Act Concerning Deceptive Advertising Practices of Limited Services Pregnancy Centers. This bill is based on false accusations against faith-based pregnancy centers. It discriminates against pro-life centers because they don't refer for or perform abortions. I'd like to address some of the accusations associated with this bill.

### **Accusation:**

**Pregnancy Centers “delay time-sensitive reproductive healthcare”**

### **Truth:**

**Pregnancy Centers are part of the process in making healthcare decisions**

When you hear the accusation that Pregnancy centers are “delaying time-sensitive reproductive health care” it's important to ask what health care is being delayed and how it that happening? The most common accusation in relation to this bill is that women in Connecticut who are seeking an **abortion** are delayed in that process by visiting a Pregnancy center. This accusation does not take into account the fact that women who visit pregnancy centers have made a choice to do so. They are visiting the center because they aren't sure if they want an abortion. They know where to find an abortion if they want one. They visit centers to find alternatives to abortion.

Pregnancy centers state on their websites, over the phone, and/or in person that they don't “perform or refer for abortions”. Even \*if\* a potential client was somehow unaware of that disclaimer prior to visiting a center, does that mean her health care is in danger of being delayed? I served as the Client Services Manager of a Pregnancy Center in CT for 4 years. I met with many women who were processing their pregnancy decisions. Every single woman knew she was in a center that was pro-life and did not refer for or perform abortions. Every single woman I met knew where to get an abortion if she wanted one. My former clients didn't view visits to the center as a delay to getting an abortion. They choose to visit the center because that was part of their

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process in deciding what to do with their pregnancy and/or seeking support for adoption or parenting.

A typical initial visit to a pregnancy center can be between 30 minutes to an hour. In that first visit a woman will fill out paperwork and learn about the services the center offers. If a woman desires a second visit to receive an ultrasound, take a parenting class or meet with an advocate, that decision is hers. If after her initial visit she wants to make an appointment at an abortion facility or adoption agency, that decision is hers. I've met with multiple women who came to a pregnancy center and later went to an abortion clinic, and then sometimes came back to the pregnancy center with their next child.

A woman leaving a pregnancy center can make an abortion appt. in minutes if that is what she desires. CT is one of a handful of states that pays for abortion through our Medicaid program. Many low-income women on Medicaid have access to abortion at no cost. CT is one of few states that has no common abortion restrictions such as mandatory waiting periods, mandatory ultrasounds, parental consent or even parental notification laws for minors seeking abortion. Therefore CT is one of the MOST accessible states for abortion in our entire country. To argue that a woman who chooses to visit a pregnancy center is now being "delayed time-sensitive care" is untrue and patronizing to women. Women make the choice to give their time to visiting pregnancy centers because that is beneficial to them. That is why pregnancy centers have existed for over 30 years and served tens of thousands of women across the state. That is why women come back over and over again, not because they are forced too but because they benefit from the services offered.

**Misconception:**

**If a Pregnancy Center isn't engaged in deceptive advertising they don't have to worry about this bill.**

**Truth:**

**When faced with biased accusations organizations must take that seriously even when they are acting in integrity.**

As I've debated various versions of this bill in prior years (HB7070 for example) I've heard legislators state that centers who aren't involved in "deceptive advertising" don't have to worry about this legislation. There has been no consensus given from legislators as to what centers are even engaging in "false advertising". All pro-life pregnancy centers are targeted in this legislation which is why you see multiple pregnancy center leaders fighting the legislation. Pro-abortion organizations like NARAL list every single CT pregnancy center on their website and in their materials as a "fake clinic". Some legislators who are endorsed or connected with NARAL believe their accusations that ALL centers are "fake clinics". Therefore in the eyes of some who will decide on whether this legislation goes forward, all pregnancy centers are already guilty before proven innocent.

We are not hearing complaints from the clients of pregnancy centers against pregnancy center staffers. We are dealing with false complaints from a pro-abortion advocacy group NARAL Pro-Choice CT against pro-life pregnancy centers. This is part of the “abortion wars” that rage on in our country and have been present since 1973 when Roe v. Wade was legalized. Pregnancy centers act in integrity and offer great care to women and families in need but that is dismissed by organizations and elected officials who are opposed to their world view. This should be clear in a nation that is already so polarized over issues of abortion. To tell a people group or an organization that’s been discriminated that if they just “do the right thing” they won’t be harassed is untrue. People of faith and certain ideological beliefs can be and are bullied simply because their opponents believe their foundational core values are harmful.

### **Misconception:**

**This legislation is needed to aid women who’ve been deceived by pregnancy centers and need protection.**

### **Truth:**

**This bill is part of a larger nationwide campaign by pro-choice organizations to discredit the work of pregnancy centers who they view as competitors.**

Again, if this bill was about the women then we would hear from them. For years pro-abortion advocates have said the women hurt by pregnancy centers are too ashamed or afraid to come forward. Women across the country are bold enough to tell their adoption, abortion, parenting stories. They bravely speak up about harassment and abuse such as in the Me Too movement. They “shout their abortion” stories on social media. It’s ridiculous to believe that there is a huge problem with pregnancy centers in CT but no women are able to come forward and tell their “horror stories”.

Where are the clients who’ve been served by pregnancy centers for the past 30 years? Where are the complaints given to the BBB, the police, social workers, etc? Complaints that are anonymous are convenient because they can’t be checked in to or disputed.

Over the past few years pro-abortion rights groups like NARAL Pro-Choice CT and Lady Parts Justice have waged a war on Pregnancy Resource Centers. Pregnancy center leaders have seen fake reviews posted on their social media sites, protests outside their centers and spies sent into the center to pose as clients. NARAL Pro-Choice CT and the Hartford GYN abortion clinic continually post accusations against pregnancy centers on their websites and social media accounts. It’s fine for pro-choice individuals and organizations to have different opinions on abortion. It’s not okay for pro-abortion rights groups and pro-choice politicians to demonize the legitimate

work of pregnancy centers. A number of CT elected officials are endorsed and supported by NARAL Pro-Choice CT. An endorsement from a group should not in any way cause the group to avoid being investigated when they make serious claims to hurt non-profit organizations. Political alliances and personal viewpoints should never take priority over people needing assistance. Pregnancy centers are daily helping thousands of women and families in need. The accusations against CT Pregnancy centers should be thoroughly investigated. When they are investigated the centers will be shown to offer quality and needed support to women and families in our state.

Thank you for your time,

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