

Testimony in favor of SB 835, An Act Concerning Deceptive Practices of Limited Services
Pregnancy Center
Public Health Committee

Submitted by:
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My name is Sally Grossman. I am from Windsor. I am providing testimony in favor of S.B. 835, An Act Concerning Deceptive Advertising Practices of Limited Services Pregnancy Centers.

I am a volunteer clinic escort at Hartford GYN Center in Hartford. They are a women's reproductive healthcare clinic that provides a range of services, including abortion. I've been a volunteer there for almost 4 years, spending most Saturday mornings walking patients past the many protesters who position themselves right outside the clinic walkway. In the spring of 2017, a Crisis Pregnancy Center, also known as a CPC, opened 10 feet away from the clinic's entrance, with their stated purpose of luring abortion minded women away from their scheduled appointment. The CPC is part of Center Gerard's Center for Life, which is a faith-based organization aimed at preventing women from terminating a pregnancy. St. Gerard's Center for Life changed their name to Hartford Women's Center, a move clearly designed to confuse patients attempting to find the Hartford GYN Center. Many of the patients who visit Hartford GYN Center for abortion related services have never been there before and part of my job as a clinic escort is to make sure that they enter the right facility. The signs for both places are identical, with the same lettering and coloring, another move aimed at deceiving patients.

Both facilities share a walkway and patients of the clinic must walk past the door to the CPC in order to enter the clinic. When the CPC first opened, they would have volunteers position themselves in the walkway, telling patients of the clinic that their appointment was actually with them. Sometimes these volunteers would wear scrubs or lab coats, despite the fact that the only medical services they offer are limited obstetrical ultrasounds and pregnancy testing.

Shortly after I first started as a clinic volunteer, a young woman, accompanied by her mother, came up to myself and other volunteers looking for Hartford GYN Center where they had a scheduled appointment. I told them where to go and saw them head down the walkway. Unbeknownst to me, Hartford Women's Center was open, with a volunteer inside. The young woman and her mother, thinking Hartford Women's Center was the medical clinic, entered the CPC. The volunteer of the CPC, who was on the phone, told the person on the other end that she had to go because her patient was there. After some time, it became clear to the mother that the CPC was not the place they wanted to be. When they asked the volunteer where the abortion clinic was, the volunteer said there was no such place nearby. I came into contact with the patient and her mother shortly after they exited the CPC. They were visibly upset, and confused. It was something that I still remember to this day. I will never forget the look on their

faces.

Because of stories such as this one, the city of Hartford passed an ordinance in the winter of 2017, preventing deceptive advertising practices and forcing the CPC to state whether or not medical staff is on the premises. Since the ordinance went into effect, I have not seen the CPC open while I have been there on Saturday mornings. There still are women who attempt to enter the center, thinking it is the medical clinic, but the door is locked. They still have signs in their windows advertising abortion pill reversals, despite the fact that they are not a proven medical intervention. From what I can gather from their website, they are now only open by appointment.

The ordinance seems to have had a positive impact on limiting deception on the part of Hartford Women's Center. But there are 25 CPCs in the state of Connecticut. Many are positioned right next to the 18 licensed family planning clinics in the state. Myself, and other clinic volunteers, should not be the only line of defense against deception by Crisis Pregnancy Centers. Women in Hartford are not the only ones who deserve protections from deceptive practices when attempting to access time sensitive medical care. I urge the legislature to vote in favor of S.B. 835 to ensure women in Connecticut are given medically accurate information.