



**Testimony for Public Hearing
Public Health Committee
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S.B. 835 AN ACT CONCERNING DECEPTIVE ADVERTISING PRACTICES OF LIMITED SERVICE PREGNANCY CENTERS.

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee, my name is Liz Gustafson and I am the State Director of NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut. I am here to testify in strong support of S.B. 835 An Act Concerning Deceptive Advertising Practices of Limited Services Pregnancy Centers.

NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut has been at the forefront of researching and documenting the practices of anti-choice crisis pregnancy centers for several years. We are an advocacy organization whose mission is to support access to the full range of reproductive healthcare services, including abortion. We gain no benefit from any particular type of medical service provided, but simply advocate to make sure that every individual is able to access the reproductive healthcare that they want and need.

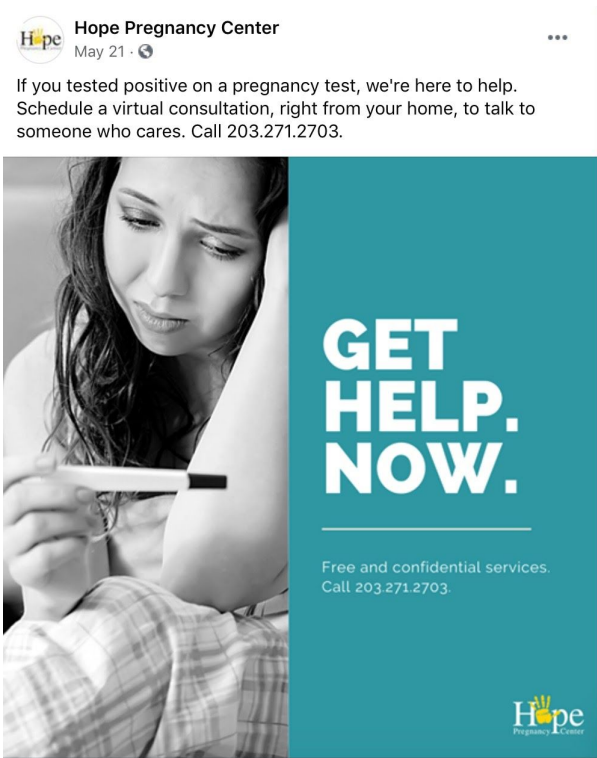
In 2015 we published a landmark report, *The Right to Lie*, which included 22 undercover visits to these centers. In December 2017 we supported the passage of a city ordinance in Hartford, limiting the deceptive practices of these centers. Our work in Hartford included significant documentation of the harm done by these centers, and their attempts to “lure” women who were seeking legitimate healthcare into one of their facilities, St. Gerard’s Center for Life (now doing business as “Hartford Women’s Center”), located next to a licensed healthcare facility providing abortion and other gynecological care, Hartford GYN Center. In March 2018 we released an updated report on crisis pregnancy centers including further undercover visits.¹ The findings from this report show that, although their practices are varied, several limited services pregnancy centers in Connecticut continue to deceive individuals who are trying to find abortion care.

Not all limited service pregnancy centers in Connecticut advertise in this manner, and we are glad to see that public pressure and this legislature’s attention to the deceptive practices that had been ongoing has led to some changes on these websites. The point remains that false advertising under any circumstance is always a problem, and it is within the authority of the State of Connecticut to legislate this issue to ensure that it does not

happen either on websites, through search engines, or through the many other ways that individual organizations may advertise, including fliers, billboards, social media and other mechanisms.

Examples of Deceptive Advertising- Facebook

Hope Pregnancy Center, May 21, 2020



Hope Pregnancy Center
May 21 · 🌐

If you tested positive on a pregnancy test, we're here to help. Schedule a virtual consultation, right from your home, to talk to someone who cares. Call 203.271.2703.

GET HELP. NOW.

Free and confidential services.
Call 203.271.2703.

Hope Pregnancy Center

ABC Women's Center, May 27, 2020



ABC Women's Center
May 27, 2020 · 🌐

ABC is now offering virtual appointments. Give us a call today!

Services available to you:

- 👉 Pregnancy Test & Ultrasounds
- 👉 Pregnancy Support & Options Counseling
- 👉 Parenting Support Program
- 👉 Post Abortive Support Program
- 👉 Local Referrals (Adoption, Housing, OB Care)

Our services are FREE and Confidential.
Call 860.344.9292 or Text 860.325.2880

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Google Search results of "abortion middletown ct" taken on March 3, 2020.

abcwomenscenter.org ▾

ABC Women's Center

Located in Middletown, CT, ABC Women's Center provides free and confidential pregnancy resources and services to women in our community. We are here to ...

[Your Options](#) · [Contact Us](#) · [Am i Pregnant?](#) · [Students](#)

abcwomenscenter.org › options › abortion ▾

Abortion – ABC Women's Center

If you are considering having an abortion, our staff is here to provide you with the information you need before ... 180 East Main Street, Middletown, CT 06457



Pathways Pregnancy Center, "Be Informed, Your Choices" taken on March 7, 2020



Abortion

If you're thinking about finding an abortion clinic, it is important to remember that abortion is a medical procedure. What type will you have? What are the risks? You deserve to know the facts. You owe it to yourself to make an informed decision.

Perhaps you're thinking:

- The father is insisting on an abortion
- I'm not ready to be a parent
- I can't tell anyone I'm pregnant

We know exactly how you feel and you're not alone. Some of our staff have been where you are. If you're considering abortion, you need to know:

- Are you really pregnant?
- Is your pregnancy normal? Or are you at risk for natural miscarriage? Or do you have a tubal pregnancy requiring immediate medical attention?
- How far along are you?

You may also be interested in knowing:

- What kinds of abortion are available to you?
- What are your rights with abortion providers?
- Are there any short-term or long-term risks to consider?

It is untenable that people who are trying to exercise their constitutional right to access abortion should face deceptive advertising and practices intended to block or delay them from getting an abortion, especially during an ongoing pandemic. This proposed legislation is extremely limited in scope. It does nothing in regard to the day-to-day operations of these limited services pregnancy centers. It simply prevents practices that are deliberately deceptive to people who think or know that they want an abortion and are looking for a licensed healthcare provider. When people look for healthcare and see somewhere that offers medical services that appears as a healthcare provider, they expect that they are going to get unbiased medical advice. When an organization has a mission to stop a certain practice, most people would agree that it is deceptive to be advertising to people as if you offer that same service.

Despite the legal right to access abortion, it remains something that is highly stigmatized. People who have been deceived when seeking abortion care may have a range of emotions from their experience, but most then go on to access the medical care that they want. The nature of these limited service pregnancy centers is that they are most likely to target those people who do not have regular access to gynecological healthcare. From our work recording patient stories, it is clear that most people who experience this kind of deception just want to access the medical care that they were originally looking for.

Additionally, patient complaints should not and cannot be the basis for dealing with this issue. The notion that this is an issue that should be resolved within the Department of Consumer Protection fails to recognize what we are actually trying to achieve with this bill. It is crucial to remember that this is very different in comparison



to other existing consumer protection mechanisms such as the case when someone purchases a defective vehicle or is scammed by a fraudulent contractor for home renovations. When facing an unplanned pregnancy, accessing the full range of options, and deciding to have an abortion is an extremely personal decision between an individual and their healthcare provider. These are people's lives, and this bill is about the wellbeing of women and those who need access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare.

Below are excerpts from in-person visits and patient stories, which illustrates the sometimes devastating and traumatizing results one may experience when seeking reproductive healthcare services such as abortion but ended up at a crisis pregnancy center.

Alisha*, 26, Volunteer visit to a crisis pregnancy center in Central Connecticut

"She reviewed all my medical history, prior pregnancies, what medications I take, she asked if I was in an abusive relationship. Then she was like ok we're gonna do the pregnancy test now. She showed me the two lines and said I was pregnant. We were all silent for two minutes and she didn't say anything. When you go upstairs it's a nice area with two desks and couches, but when you walk through that room there's a whole set up, a whole OB-GYN like an exam room. It looked like a real clinic. It looked legit. I asked, "What are my options? I don't really want to be pregnant?" So then she mostly said adoption, parenting, and then said well there's abortion. But she kept saying you have a lot of time, you don't need to make a decision now, she didn't really want to talk about abortion. I asked her about the abortion pill, so then she started off neutral and told me about the abortion pill. She said you could be laying in your bed and bleed all over and you could see the baby in your bed. She couldn't pronounce any of the medications. She was looking things up on her phone and she was texting people during the appointment. Eventually she got mad when I asked about abortion. She just kept telling me I had time to make a decision and not to worry and that I didn't need to decide now. She just kept saying you have time. You have time to decide. When I was leaving they wanted me to make another appointment. Then they asked if they could pray for me."

Shania*, 21 Patient deceived by a crisis pregnancy center in the Greater Hartford area:

"When we parked there were people outside and I didn't want to get out of the car. I was scared. When I was walking to the building there was a door open and the lady said, "Come in here" to me and my mom. She was on the phone and said "I have to call you back I have a patient coming in" and sat us down. The lady was just

being really obnoxious to me and saying stuff that had me scared. She didn't ask for my ID or health insurance. She was saying I was sinning if I get an abortion and that I'm gonna regret it. She was saying stuff like if I get a surgical one I might not make it out alive. She said that someone had half a baby left inside her after. She was ignoring what I was saying and just kept saying all this stuff. She had us sit down and talk with her like that was the real place. She just kept saying way too much stuff and my mom was like come on we gotta leave. It was really scary because sometimes people are not ready to have a baby but this was a really bad experience. My experience was really bad for the first time because the things she was saying were uncalled for, then seeing all the stuff in the office scared me as well. A lot of the rooms were dark and there was a basket of little baby dolls on the floor. If I didn't have my mom with me they might have changed my mind because I was scared.



We asked her where is the appointment for the abortions and 1 Prochoicect.org 2 ExposeCPCS.org she said there's no abortion center here..."

J.*, 26, Volunteer who visited a crisis pregnancy center in Southeastern Connecticut

"My fiancé and I went to a pregnancy center in the New London area. On the homepage of the website it says "Considering Abortion? Care Net is your first step." The website also says they offer free pregnancy services such as ultrasounds, pre- termination evaluations, information about options, free pregnancy tests. It says everything is professional and confidential and you can schedule your appointment online. The waiting room area had usual pamphlets like any doctors office. My fiancé told the lady in there she thought she might be pregnant and asked for a pregnancy test. When the receptionist called her in, they did not want me to come in the room and said it was against policy, but because my fiancé insisted, they allowed me to come in. The back rooms were small. There was an exam room and a few other small rooms that looked like conference rooms. The counseling room we went into was small. The counselor was super friendly and welcoming at first. The conversation started out normal as she asked us what brought us in today, etc. Throughout the beginning of the appointment I really felt welcomed and comfortable. However, the more comfortable we got, the more personal and then aggressive the counselor got with us. She asked my fiancé what she was thinking of doing about the pregnancy and she said she wanted to terminate the pregnancy. The counselor stated that they didn't do those there but they had counseling to help her make the decision. She then told us a personal story about how she had been raped 20+ years ago and had gotten an abortion. She said getting the abortion was the worst decision of her life and she regretted it every day and even had PTSD because of it.. She then told us how abortions can make it hard for women to conceive again, and that they offered services at their center to help mothers support the babies through the first year. She also advised my fiancé NOT to tell anyone she was pregnant until she made an additional appointment at the center to further discuss her options. She was very persistent about my fiancé not telling anyone she was pregnant. The longer we were in there and the more my fiancé vocalized her opinions on not being able to have a baby at her age, the more aggressive the counselor got about her not having an abortion. The counselor wanted us to wait at the center as they were going to call the nurse in that day to give an ultrasound. We said she had to work and they replied with the nurse could be there in 30 minutes as she was not in on the day we went. They were very persistent about wanting us to see the nurse that day. Overall the longer we were there the more uncomfortable I felt. I hope that when someone is looking for a real reproductive health clinic they do not end up at this place. No woman should have to go through all of this just to get a pregnancy test and possibly make medical decisions like abortion.

Sierra*, 25, Patient deceived and intercepted in the greater Hartford area

"First off I didn't know where I was going. We opened the door of the wrong building and this lady was standing there and came up and forcibly was trying to give me her papers. I said, "No thank you" and she goes "we're offering \$50 and free ultrasounds" and I told her "no thank you I don't need that" and again she goes "well we're offering \$50 here" like \$50 was going to make a difference in my life. Then she walked behind us all the way to the door of the other building."

Anna*, 22, Volunteer who visited a crisis pregnancy center



“The first thing I noticed when we pulled up to our assigned fake clinic in the New Haven area was its location. It was almost adjacent to Yale University, and my friend and I had trouble finding the clinic because it was tucked away behind a legitimate OB- GYN. We parked in “patient parking.” It felt like we were walking up to a doctor’s office. Of course, I knew that this could not have been further from the truth, and that the Crisis Pregnancy Center had purposefully placed itself next to a real OBGYN, near students who would not know the difference, and without putting in much effort to distinguish themselves from the legitimate medical office with which they shared a building. I was going undercover as a college student who had just found out that she was pregnant, was in an unstable relationship with the father, and was young and naïve enough to not have a full understanding of birth control, abortion, and the manipulative tactics of CPCs like the one I was attending. The website for the CPC offered services like “abstinence and STD education,” and under “Pregnancy Choices,” they said they could give me “Abortion information and medical facts.” I wanted to see what sort of “education” they could offer me. When we finally found the CPC, we entered what might have been a child’s playroom. There were piles of baby shoes in a corner, and baby dolls propped up everywhere. Poems and prayers lined the walls, as well as “informational material” letting us know when my baby could feel pain or had ten toes. I noted that a big poster told me my baby could feel comfort and pain at just ten weeks, when I know for a fact that pain nociceptors are not even developed until twenty weeks, and the ability to understand pain signals is not developed until full term. I went in to the bathroom (which was, of course, equipped with a changing table and a baby doll at the ready) to take my free pregnancy test, at which point I noticed a poem entitled “My Silent Plea” on top of the toilet, which described a violent image of abortion, obviously meant to guilt-trip women in my very situation. After my pregnancy test, I went back into the waiting room for “counseling.” What struck most about the “counseling” was the blatant lack of knowledge on the part of the CPC worker. The worker told me that pregnancies were “not as strong” until about the ninth or tenth week, so I should “come in again” for further testing, which seemed like a tactical delay so that I would wait longer to potentially get an abortion. Even if I wanted to keep the baby, this would have also delayed me in getting prenatal care. She insisted that she, as a Christian, was against abortion and birth control—as though you can’t be a Christian and for reproductive health. She told me and my friend that abortions and birth control were “dangerous,” and that “lots of students” can “easily” raise a child and be in school full-time. In addition, the counseling was conducted in the waiting room without any privacy whatsoever, and a family with three small children sat nearby while we discussed tense, emotional topics. It seemed incredibly inappropriate and there was not even a semblance of confidentiality. I thought the experience was deeply disturbing, and I was shocked at how little a “counselor” could know. It was an obvious example of misinformation and deception, as well as purposeful delaying in decision-making. I imagined how scared and confused I would be if I had just come to the CPC without my background knowledge, because not only did it seem like it was a part of an actual OBGYN office, it also offered contradictory advice. They gave me many informational pamphlets that stressed adoption over abortion, saying that in adoption my “pregnancy would end with life,” but in abortion, my pregnancy would “end in death,” and I might feel “shame or guilt,” and I “will remember taking a life.” This was a horrible facility meant to trick people who don’t know specifically that it is a fake clinic. It was deeply upsetting to experience, and should never be something experienced by any woman in the community.”

Amy*, 23, Volunteer who visited a crisis pregnancy center in Western Connecticut.



“Last year, I visited a crisis pregnancy center in Western Connecticut. For this crisis pregnancy center, some of the results from an online search of “abortion waterbury” say “Abortion and your health. Thinking about pregnancy or abortion? Facing an unplanned pregnancy but not sure about abortion? We can help you find answers.” Especially when someone is unsure and nervous about where to go, these ads are very overwhelming. At the time of this visit I was volunteering my time to help NARAL Pro- Choice Connecticut with research about these centers. Our goal was to get a better look at how this crisis pregnancy center actually operates and what information, or lack thereof, they give to women about pregnancy and their options. It’s very easy to be

deceived by these centers-- you can find their ads on buses, billboards, and especially while searching online. When I called to make an appointment, I was directly connected to the center’s weekend hotline. The woman answering the phone was very vague and didn’t ask many questions. She just told me I could come in for a pregnancy test and “talk through my options.” She didn’t say much about what was offered there but on the website it said “Client Services, Pregnancy Information, Pregnancy Choices, Sexual Health, Abortion & Health Risks.” I could see how someone would be unsure. I arrived at the crisis pregnancy center with a friend who came to support me. We were instructed to come to the back door and were invited in by a woman. We walked through the kitchen, with lots of religious pictures and decorations. At this point, the woman asked for my support person to stay in the kitchen while we talked. I emphasized that I was scared and wanted my friend with me. We went back and forth again, but eventually she agreed to let me have my support person come with me into a living room with a desk that the woman sat behind. While I took a pregnancy test, she talked to my friend and got more information about me and the situation. I told her that I was currently single, and that the father did not know about the pregnancy. My friend added that she did not approve of him, and the woman scoffed and said, “Well, you probably should have figured that out before you got into bed with him, huh?” I was shocked she would say something like that during what was supposed to be a counseling session. When the test came back positive, she told me about the joys of motherhood, even though I was clearly distressed, and pulled out a few dolls that were supposed to be the size of a fetus at 8 weeks and said “These babies are what your baby looks like right now.” The dolls she pulled out were clearly bigger and more detailed than an actual fetus at 8 weeks. I kept saying, “I do not want to be pregnant. I can’t have a baby.” She said that she would only talk to me about having the baby and adoption. She never said the word abortion and told me that if that’s what I decided to do, I’d have to live with my decision for the rest of my life and would disappoint my family if I made the wrong choice. She was very shameful and told me to think about what my grandparents would think about my decision. At some point during the conversation, the woman began to direct all conversation to my friend instead of talking to me or answering my questions. She said to my friend, “Clearly she’s too overwhelmed by this news to think straight or absorb anything, so I’ll just talk to you.” I felt unheard and patronized by the whole experience, like I was only a body, not a whole person. We left with lots of brochures on parenting and adoption, as well as a list of catholic hospitals and doctors offices they referred to. The woman told my support person to call if I needed more support or wanted to be put in touch with any of their parenting programs or adoption services. After this experience, I feel horrified knowing that women facing unintended pregnancy might come to this crisis pregnancy center seeking nonjudgmental support and accurate information. Instead, it was my experience that women receive biased, inaccurate, and oftentimes demeaning counseling. If I was a woman in that situation, I could have easily believed what the woman told me. If a woman is specifically



looking for information about abortion or reproductive healthcare I would be scared about what is told to her in this crisis pregnancy center. When someone is seeking all-options counseling from a legitimate clinic, they shouldn't have to go through this confusion and shame.

Tara*, 21, Woman who was deceived by a crisis pregnancy center in central Connecticut.

“In 2015, I was 19 and there was a possibility that I could’ve been pregnant. I had just enrolled in college and I was scared, helpless, and confused! I didn’t know what to do, who to talk to or where to go. I lived in Middletown, CT my whole life and during my commutes to our local grocery store, I would often pass the ABC Women’s Center. They would frequently advertise that they offer free pregnancy tests and moral support. I thought this would be a health clinic that could help me in my situation. When I walked in, I was greeted by their receptionist, she asked why I was there, and I told her. They asked for my ID and information. She provided me the supplies I needed to perform the pregnancy test. Afterwards, I brought into a room that was like a counselor’s office. A few minutes passed by, and another woman entered the room and indicated that my test results were negative! I was so relieved! The women then started asking me what was my religious affiliation was and if I was considering birth control. I explained to her that I did not identify with any religion and I wanted to explore my birth control options. The lady then began to hand me different pamphlets on religion and a lecture me on how the only form of birth control is abstinence and that all other forms can harm my body. She made me feel uncomfortable and guilty that I was sexually active. I will never go to this crisis pregnancy center ever again. Women shouldn’t be confused about what kind of help they can get at a pregnancy center.”

Emergency Room Physician, Hartford area

“Betty was a young woman whom I met in the Emergency Room for abdominal pain. Her pregnancy was visibly showing and her aunt was convinced she had a tumor. She revealed to me that she was hiding her pregnancy from her family and had been seeing a women’s center, a crisis pregnancy center, in Hartford because she wanted a termination. She told me she had gone every few weeks for last few months, but was not given any instructions on how to have an abortion yet. Performing her ultrasound, I was able to determine her fetus was 25 weeks and 4 days, past the legal limit for abortion. I had to tell her that even though she had clearly indicated her desire to terminate her desires had been realized months prior, now she had no choice in the matter because she had been misled and pushed past the legal limit. As I watched tears stream down her face, my heart broke that HER life and dreams had not been valued and she was blocked from getting the medical care she needed.”

ⁱ NARAL Pro-Choice Connecticut. March 2018. Crisis Pregnancy Centers: A Threat to Reproductive Freedom. <https://connecticut.prochoiceamericaaffiliates.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/17/2018/03/2018-CPC-Report.pdf>

Pathways Pregnancy Center. 2020 Be Informed, Your Choices. <https://www.pathwayspregnancy.org/be-informed/your-choices> Accessed March 7, 2020