

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO SB 835

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Hello, distinguished members of the council. My name is Nina Khamarji from Trumbull, CT. I am a Labor and Delivery nurse at Yale New Haven Hospital. I have also been the local Center Director of Hopeline PRC in Bridgeport, CT for the last year, and I am in strong opposition to SB 835.

After reading the proposed bill, I was shocked to find that the same issues with last year's proposed bill exist in this year's proposed bill. These areas of concern are significant and deserve to be addressed.

The first is that the bill intends to prevent pregnancy resource centers from making "any statement concerning any pregnancy-related service or the provision of any pregnancy-related service that is deceptive" (SB 835). However, what is considered deceptive is *still* not specified. There is no definition for "deceptive" in Section 1 of the bill. The language is left extremely vague. The only specification is found in Section 2, where the bill refers to what pregnancy resource centers "should know to be deceptive" (SB 835). Now, I think that I have a pretty good idea of what is right and wrong, deceptive or not deceptive. I am also fairly confident that my idea of what is right and wrong is significantly different than what the writers of the bill consider to be right and wrong. It concerns me that the ambiguity of the language of the bill could be abused or manipulated to meet an unspecified agenda.

Another concern is that the bill gives the Attorney General sole authority to decide what is deceptive, and therefore a punishable offense. Based on Section 3 of the bill, the Attorney General alone can decide to bring a pregnancy resource center to court if they do something that is viewed as deceptive and do not remediate the offense within ten days of written notice. There is no outline for what acceptable remediation would look like. This could mean that necessary funds, time, and resources that would otherwise go towards providing services to our patients would instead go towards fighting legal battles. Hopeline has historically been 100% financially funded by private donors. Every service that

we provide, including pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, and a year's supply of clothes, diapers, and wipes for each patient, is offered at no cost. We do not have unlimited funds to spend on legal counsel whenever the Attorney General decides that we are not following undefined rules.

I know that the counterargument is that if centers were not being deceptive then we wouldn't have to worry. However, we DO have to worry because one person would have the power to decide what is deceptive based on their own moral compass or personal agenda. Is it deceptive for me to wear a white jacket or medical attire? I'm a real nurse! That is my uniform! Is it deceptive that we provide medical information? Again, I am a medical professional and that is completely within my scope of practice. It was also mentioned that pregnancy resource centers move near abortion clinics and that this is an example of deception- that we are aiming to trick women into coming through our doors. Our Bridgeport center has been in the same location for thirteen years. Two years ago, Planned Parenthood moved in behind us. Will we now be penalized for our location?

A third major grievance that I have with this bill is it targets one very specific group of people, but omits another completely. If this bill is truly being raised to protect women from deceptive advertising practices, shouldn't it extend to all offices that provide pregnancy-related services? Why is it that this bill specifically attacks pregnancy centers? And, if the complaint is against our advertising practices, why isn't it being heard by the General Law Committee which has "cognizance of all matters relating to the Department of Consumer Protection, fair trade and sales practices, [and] consumer protection" (cga.ct.gov). It seems that pregnancy centers are already regulated by the Connecticut Unfair Trade Practices Act (CUTPA), which protects women (and men!) from deceptive advertising practices. I have heard it argued in past years that pregnancy centers are not regulated by CUTPA because there is no exchange of money. However, the act itself defines "trade" and "commerce" as "the advertising, the sale or rent or lease, the offering for sale or rent or lease, or the distribution of any services and any property, tangible or intangible, real, personal or mixed, and any other article, commodity, or thing of value in this state" (CUTPA). It never specifies that there has to be a financial transaction.

I do completely agree that pregnancy resource centers should be transparent about their role in the community. At Hopeline, honesty and transparency are fundamental to our mission. As an example, each patient has to sign a Limitation of Services, which specifies what we do and don't offer at our centers. Our website clearly states that we are a faith based organization, and that we do not refer for abortion, but that the medical staff at each location can give factual medical information about the different procedures. Again, as a nurse, this is completely within my scope of practice.

I began working at a pregnancy center because I wanted to help women in a real way. Every day I strive to make our center a safe place where women can come, be honest about what they are going through, become informed about all of the options that are available to them, and make a decision that they can live with. Our goal is to educate and empower women and to love them no matter what. We serve the uninsured and insured, women of every color, who speak every language, who are of every age and we do it for no cost at all. We follow up with each and every one of our patients no matter what their pregnancy decision was. In 2020 alone, in the midst of a pandemic, we performed 1,009 pregnancy tests, 838 ultrasounds, and 1,063 appointments where we provided patients and other members of the community with the resources they need to care for their children. We perform a vital role in our communities and our patients need us to continue to offer these services. They refer us to their friends, sisters, daughters, and they come back to us for subsequent pregnancies.

If any of the members of the council are still on the fence and would like to come and tour our offices, **we would love to have you**. It is our hope that you will help us to continue to provide a vital function in our communities that is not being provided by anyone else and vote No to SB 835.

Sincerely,
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