

CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

Wednesday, February 10, 2021

Testimony of Bill O'Brien, Vice President, Connecticut Right to Life, Concerning S.B. 835 "An Act Concerning Deceptive Advertising Practices of Limited Services Pregnancy Centers"

Members of the Public Health Committee, my name is William O'Brien, from Wolcott, I am vice president of Connecticut Right to Life, and I ask you to vote "NO" on SB 835.

Pro-life pregnancy care centers treat each pregnant woman and her unborn child with love. Mother and child. They love them both.

And why wouldn't they? Like some other pro-life leaders, many pregnancy center staff and volunteers once had unplanned pregnancies, or even abortions, themselves. They've been there.

I'll give two examples. Do you know who Catherine Glen Foster is? In college, Catherine had an abortion. Catherine is now pro-life, and she is an attorney. In fact, she is president and CEO of Americans United for Life (AUL), the oldest and most influential pro-life legal group in the nation.

If you didn't know Catherine, perhaps you have heard of Alveda King. Alveda's uncle was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Alveda had two abortions, but she is now pro-life. She says ending abortion is the most significant civil rights issue of our time. In fact, she calls abortion black genocide.

These women, both of whom had abortions, now support pro-life pregnancy centers, and the women who go to them. And why not? As I said, these pro-life leaders have been there.

Most all pregnancy centers offer their services and resources for free - including free pregnancy tests, free ultrasounds, free maternity clothes, free formula, free diapers, free baby clothes, free car seats, and free maternity clothes. And most women leave the pregnancy centers with a live baby.

Which of those services or items do abortion clinics offer or give away for free? None, that I am aware of. Women, or taxpayers, pay for everything. And women leave the abortion clinic with a dead child.

Which is really pro-woman?

No wonder the number of abortion clinics is dropping, while the number of pregnancy centers keeps increasing. That's what this bill is actually all about. Abortion clinics can't stand the competition. According to a report by the Abortion Care Network, a national association for

independent abortion providers, the number of independent abortion clinics fell 32% in recent years, from 510 clinics in 2012 to only 344 as of November, 2019. Planned Parenthood had about 391 clinics doing medical or surgical abortions in 2019. That's a total of about 635 abortion clinics.

On the other hand, the number of pregnancy centers is about 2,800, and growing.

The number of abortions in this country peaked around 1990 at over 1.6 million, but has declined by almost half to just over 800,000 in 2017.

It's pretty obvious that women don't want what abortion clinics are selling any more.

If R.B. 835 becomes law, and a pregnancy center becomes covered by it, if that pregnancy center then began referring for abortion, that center would no longer be subject to that law. Thus, whether this bill would apply to a pregnancy center or not comes down to whether it would refer for abortion, or not.

An existing federal law, called the Weldon Amendment, addresses this specific situation. Since some pregnancy care centers provide limited medical services, such as limited ultrasounds, they are defined as health care entities that are protected by the Weldon Amendment. The Weldon Amendment says that if a State subjects any health care entity to discrimination because the health care entity "does not provide, pay for, provide coverage of, or refer for abortions," the federal government could withhold Labor or HHS appropriations from that State.

The State of Connecticut, by not applying the same scrutiny to advertising by abortion clinics, would be discriminating against pro-life pregnancy care centers because they do not provide, pay for, provide coverage of, or refer for abortions.

How many millions of dollars does the State of Connecticut expect to receive from the Federal government this year, and in future years, from HHS and Labor Department funding bills? Millions, I would guess.

This discriminatory bill, S.B. 835, could place Connecticut in danger of losing those millions of dollars of federal funds from HHS and Labor appropriations.

Two years ago, HHS's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) determined that a California law targeting pro-life pregnancy care centers violated the Weldon Amendment. The OCR took similar action that year against Hawaii. Since both states agreed to not enforce their discriminatory laws, they did not lose federal funds, but both states were required to pay the legal fees of the pro-life pregnancy care centers.

Regardless of which administration is in power in Washington, D.C., now, or in future years, the Weldon Amendment is law, and this committee can avoid the potential loss of federal funds or paying the legal bills of pregnancy care centers, by letting this bill die right here in committee.

Vote 'NO' on S.B. 835.