



116 Grove Street, Torrington, CT 06790

Testimony on

S.B. 835 “An Act Concerning Deceptive Advertising Practices of Limited Services Pregnancy Centers”

Before the Public Health Committee

February 10, 2021

Members of the Public Health Committee, my name is Deacon David Reynolds, a member of the Catholic clergy in our state, and Chairman and founder of the Two Hearts Pregnancy Care Center located in Torrington Connecticut. I am here today to speak in opposition to Senate Bill 835 *An Act Concerning Deceptive Advertising Practices of Limited Services Pregnancy Centers*. This proposed bill is based on completely inaccurate and misleading information about pregnancy resource centers in our state and is part of a national campaign to discredit the work that these centers perform. This legislation is not actually driven by concerns over false and misleading advertising, but by an ideological conflict between pregnancy resource centers, that do not provide abortion services, and centers that do provide or refer for abortions. *The word “abortion” is the linchpin in determining who is covered by this proposed legislation and who is not.* Anyone arguing that this bill is not based on an organizations viewpoint on abortion has not closely read the bill.

Every pregnancy resource center operates differently and is an independent organization. I would briefly like to take this opportunity to tell you about our center. Two Hearts Pregnancy Care Center is a community based non-profit organization that services women as they find themselves facing an unplanned pregnancy, having economic difficulties providing for their newly born children or trying to leave an abusive relationship with their children. Since opening in 2012, Two Hearts has provided emotional support, parenting skills, and supplies to hundreds of women and their children. Two Hearts has a working relationship with many social service agencies in Torrington, including the local hospital. Two Hearts makes referrals to these organizations and they make referrals to Two Hearts. Two Hearts receives no state or federal financial aid and is funded totally by donations and fundraising activities.

Two Hearts **is not** an organization that lies to women in need or that falsely or deceptively advertises it services to mislead pregnant women looking for help. A large part of the women we have serviced have come to Two Hearts based on referrals from other social service organizations, family members and friends. This high number of referrals shows that people in the community support and trust Two Hearts. If we practiced any of the dubious activities that proponents of this bill claim, the referral numbers would be drastically lower. Two Hearts spends almost no funds on advertising.

I mentioned earlier that this legislation is more about an ideological conflict between the pregnancy resource centers and the primary organization pushing and supporting this legislation, NARAL. On both the national and state level, NARAL has been lobbying for legislation similar to S.B. 835 for almost a decade. Also, similar to their campaigns in other states, and in the City of Hartford, there is no actual evidence of the abuses they reference. The Hartford ordinance has never been enforced. Passage of that ordinance in Hartford was a political win for NARAL, nothing more.

In fact, legal actions across the nation over the past several years have almost entirely ruled these type of laws unconstitutional. In several of these court cases, lack of substantiated evidence of the harm done to women was one of the major reasons the courts ruled against the laws. In other words, just like in Connecticut, there has been a complete lack of evidence that the centers are intentionally misleading women.

If this proposed bill is adopted, the state would be incorporating “*viewpoint discrimination*” into state law, opening the legislation up to a federal legal challenge. Proof of this statement can be found in Section 1(7) where *limited services pregnancy center* is defined as centers that do not provide referrals for abortions or emergency contraception. This automatically excludes any center, such as Planned Parenthood centers, from being covered by this proposed legislation because they perform or refer for abortions. *If any pregnancy care center in Connecticut added abortion referrals to its list of services it would no longer be covered by this proposed legislation.* All pregnancy care centers in Connecticut are Christian in nature and operate under the belief of the sanctity of unborn life. They are being singled out in this legislation for that belief.

Additionally, what constitutes false advertising is not clearly defined in this legislation, making centers vulnerable to harassing legal suits which would exhaust financial resources so badly needed to aid the women and children they serve.

Two Hearts and many other centers I have interacted with do not practice misleading or deceptive advertising. Like Two Hearts, they treat the women seeking assistance with compassion and caring support. I believe that an act of true deception, with a complete lack of concern for the women we serve, is being practiced by NARAL and the organizations promoting this legislation.

I urge the members of the Public Health Committee to oppose S. B. 835.

Deacon David Reynolds, Chairman
Two Hearts Pregnancy Care Center
Torrington