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Imagine!
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Dear members of the Public Health Committee,

I am submitting this testimony in support of SB 835.

I consider myself a progressive person, and the first amendment is very important to me. But I believe there is a significant difference between the right to free speech, and engaging in fraudulent activities designed to trick women at one of the most vulnerable times in their lives.

My first awareness of the phenomenon I call ‘fake clinics’ came in the late 1970’s. A Planned Parenthood in Boston filed suit against an organization that had rented space near them, that was calling itself something like ‘Planning Parenthood.’ The organization was an anti abortion group that was attempting to trick women into getting confused about which was the actual clinic. Shortly after that, in about 1986, a similar anti abortion organization called the White Rose, rented space in my building—in fact, right across the breezeway from the front door of the Dallas, Texas clinic where I was Director. The White Rose was staffed and funded by the Catholic Church, and was modeled after the ideas of Robert Pearson. Mother Jones did an excellent history of this tactic: <https://motherjones.com/wp-content/uploads/cpchistory2.pdf>, by Dawn Stacey M.Ed, LMHC which includes:

“History of Crisis Pregnancy Centers:

In 1967, the first Crisis Pregnancy Center in the United States was opened by Robert Pearson in Hawaii. As a way to promote the Pregnancy Center Movement, in 1969, Mr. Pearson then founded the anti-choice Pearson Foundation, a St. Louis-based organization to assist local groups in setting up crisis (anti-abortion) counseling centers.

and

The Pearson Manual:

How to Start and Operate Your Own Pro-Life Outreach Crisis Pregnancy Center is the manual authored by Robert Pearson and has been described by law-enforcement officials around the US as a 93-page guidebook of ways to mislead consumers. It instructs staff how to falsely portray a CPC as an abortion provider and how to evade client questions on the telephone. Examples found in the manual include:

- Regarding when a caller asks if they provide abortion services, “there is nothing wrong or dishonest if you don’t want to answer a question that may reveal your pro-life position by changing the caller’s train of thought by asking a question in return”
- Recommends that staff answer the question “Are you a pro-life center?” with “We are a pregnancy testing center... What is pro-life?”
- Instructs centers to use neutral advertising, to seek listings in the Yellow Pages alongside abortion clinics and to adopt "dual names": one to "draw abortion- bound women" and one to attract donations from people against abortion
- Advises when answering inquiries about their pregnancy tests (the same home pregnancy tests available from a store), "Tell her it's a refined form of the old rabbit test. This usually satisfies them. At no time do you need to tell them what you're doing"
- Instructs staff to "never counsel for contraception"
- Cautions "do not tell the client that she is or is not pregnant." Instead, staff are told to only say whether test results are positive or negative
- The manual reads, "[o]ur name of the game is to get the woman to come in as do the abortion chambers. Be put off by nothing... Let nothing stop you. The stakes are life or death."

Robert Pearson has publicly admitted this deception; in a 1994 speech, he responded, “obviously, we’re fighting Satan... A killer, who in this case is the girl who wants to kill her baby, has no right to information that will help her kill her baby. Therefore, when she calls and says, ‘Do you do abortions?’ we do not tell her, No, we don’t do abortions.”

So this cruel and illegal deception has been going on for *fifty-four years*. I cannot imagine any other area of medicine in which such tactics would be permitted for fifty-four days! There were many aspects to the deception, including advertising in the Yellow Pages under abortion. In those pre-Internet days, most women looked for abortion services in the Yellow Pages. I was assisted rectifying this by the Attorney General for the state of Texas, at that time, Jim Mattox. His office asked me to accompany them to the library to show them in various Yellow pages across the state which were actual clinics and which were fake clinics. It is a testimony to their artifice, that even I could not always tell the difference. How could a consumer possibly imagine

that a government that was well aware of consumer fraud would permit this kind of trickery? With the AG on our side, I was able to work with the companies that published YP to at least make two separate listings—one for *Abortion Alternatives* and the other for *Abortion Services*. These categories are still confusing, and is not what I would have chosen. Can you imagine having ‘Adoption Agencies’ and ‘Adoption Alternatives’? ‘Bookstores’ and ‘Bookstore Alternatives?’ Notice which one comes first. And worst of all, in a country that had eliminated all government funding for abortion care, their ad read something like, ‘Abortion counseling and financial aid.’

But it was better than nothing. As you can imagine, in today’s world it is almost impossible to police advertising. I can’t imagine how confusing it already must be for a woman to try to find a safe and honest place where she can get the reproductive care that is her legal right under our Constitution.

All those years ago, we did everything we could think of to inform the public about the presence of this fake clinic in our building. The White Rose would send its volunteers, wearing white medical coats, out into the parking lot to usher patients into their office. Once there, they showed them propaganda films that had just enough medical jargon to appear plausible. I watched over and over as women who finally realized they were not in a real clinic got out of there, and found us just across the breezeway. They would stand at our front desk crying and shaking. They had been told that they would probably die if they had an abortion, but it was still what they wanted. More than one woman broke into sobs after the simple five-minute early abortion procedure (which about 30 times safer than continuing a pregnancy) and said, ‘I can’t believe I lived.’ No amount of honest counseling can really offset the kind of baseless and false lies they saw in those films. The White Rose played on the shame that was already prevalent in our culture, and preyed on young, vulnerable, non-English speaking, and poor women disproportionately. Women who had no one to ask for a suggestion about a real clinic.

My clinic collected hundreds of statements from women and their friends and family who were tricked, or nearly tricked into going into the White Rose, thinking it was actually an abortion clinic. These statements were read into the Congressional record during hearings. One such hearing was reported by the New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/09/21/us/congressional-inquiry-examines-reports-of-bogus-abortion-clinics.html>. Being a fair person, I was convinced that this cruel treachery would not be allowed to continue. Since those days, not only have the continued and proliferated, they have also received government funding on the state and even federal level. This is doubly ironic, because no federal dollars can go to the provision of abortion care. As the number of actual abortion clinics has dwindled, the number of fake clinics has increased—now over three thousand. It is possible that not every fake clinic uses as many deceptive tactics as Robert Pearson recommended, but it is clear that they are unwilling to advertise as what they really are. If they are required to call themselves, *Adoption or Birth Required, No Birth Control Permitted* they would not attract very many women. One hugely evil part of their current strategies is that they sometimes offer free ultrasound services (usually totally un-supervised by any state agency). Abortion care providers are not sponsored by religious institutions, so they cannot afford to do that. So some women go to the fake clinics for their free services—later to rue the day when they are shamed.

I have visited the clinic in Hartford, not long after this fake clinic was scheduled to move in. I saw how difficult it would be to make sure their patients found the right door. And I am furious that after more than half a century, government officials are still permitting consumer fraud. It is because the consumers are women? Or because the service is abortion? I don't know. But I know it is up to you to stop this now.

Sincerely,

Charlotte Taft