

I am submitting testimony in favor of Raised Bill No. 835 An Act Concerning Deceptive Advertising Practices Of Limited Services Pregnancy Centers.

I was a volunteer for NARAL and the Hartford GYN Center when St. Gerard's Center for Life, a limited pregnancy (fake) clinic, first opened its doors literally on the same property but in the building next door to the Hartford GYN Center. My duties included being a clinic escort, standing outside assisting the people coming to Hartford GYN Center to do so without being harassed by protestors.

I clearly remember those Saturday mornings and St. Gerard's door being open to the walkway. Walking past, you could see a couch, a coffee bar, and often a person in a white medical coat, even though the office itself looked nothing like a doctor's office. I remember overhearing a visitor, as she left, telling her companion that she was right that birth control causes cancer shaking a piece of paper in her hand that appeared to have come from St. Gerard's. I also remember the confusion they sowed; folks coming to Hartford GYN Center needed to pass St. Gerard's door first and they used this to lure folks inside their premise.

I also work in downtown Waterbury and often see their "free ultrasound" van on the town green. It uses the same spot as other local non-profits and the farmer's market. There is nothing about the van that makes it appear to be a pregnancy counseling center and since Waterbury is a community with a high poverty rate, I can only surmise it is looking to sucker the desperate with what appears to be free medical care.

As an atheist and humanist, healthcare, including reproductive healthcare, must be based on science and sound advice. Pregnancy is a medical condition. It is not magic. There are no angels singing. A person who finds themselves pregnant must be able to determine easily and readily which is an actual medical practice, like Hartford GYN Center, and which is a group of religious zealots providing counseling based on church teachings and access to an ultrasound machine.

I was there at Hartford's City Hall when testimony was given on their version of this bill. I know firsthand that part of their argument is that when a person finds themselves pregnant, they need someone to talk to, to help guide them. Our state has awesome clinics, like Wheeler and Planned Parenthood, who provide licensed medical staff that provide a full range of services based on science, not on a religion that more and more folks turn away from every day. I can attest to the care of both as my family and I have used Wheeler in recent years, and I started using Planned Parenthood 40 years ago when I was in high school and have recently turned to them for my yearly wellness care because of the compassion and consideration they provide.

I am in no way saying that churches, synagogues, and temples cannot practice their teachings and/or provide outreach for new supplicants. I just do not see how it is in anyone's best interest when they hide it by pretending to be licensed medical providers as St. Gerard's and other limited pregnancy (fake) clinics do. The same goes for counseling. There is a reason we as a society license medical providers and counselors because we as a society agree we need to make sure folks are provided with quality care based on science, not on religion. And folks in need of reproductive healthcare should not be the exception to this social contract.

Thank you,

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