

## Testimony Re: Raised S.B. No. 835 AN ACT CONCERNING DECEPTIVE ADVERTISING PRACTICES OF LIMITED SERVICES PREGNANCY CENTERS.

Chairwoman Abrams, Chairman Steinberg, Ranking members Hwang, Somers, Petit and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit our comments on Raised Senate Bill 835.

As a long-standing provider of women's health services in the area, Women's Health Connecticut (WHC), and its 270+ member ObGyn providers across the State of Connecticut, feels strongly about educating and empowering our patients with accurate and transparent information about their reproductive health care. It is in that spirit that we find the motives of limited-service pregnancy service centers (CPCs) to be misleading, dangerous and unacceptable – and we support the passage of SB No. 835. Several CPC activities fuel our concern:

- CPCs often strive to delay time-sensitive care. When they delay access to comprehensive care, women may miss the opportunity to use emergency contraception to prevent pregnancy or may miss the window of opportunity for abortion.
- CPCs strategically set up in geographies that seem to target medically under-served populations, drawing them into CPC facilities and mobile units with “free ultrasounds” and other promotional hooks.
- In Connecticut, there are 25 CPCs that rely on volunteers who often have no medical training wear scrubs or white lab coats to give the appearance of being medical professionals. They often tout the presence of a "medical director" who is not actually on location. *Note that we are grateful for the Hartford City ordinance passed in 2018 that mandates signage that a licensed medical practitioner is on location and feel this needs to be statewide.*
- WHC team members have seen, first-hand from patients, CPC literature that has been given to patients stating false claims that abortion causes breast cancer, leads to sterility, is psychologically damaging and that a medically-induced abortion can be reversed after taking the abortion pill.
- In 2015, the Hartford Women's Center opened its doors in the same complex as the Hartford GYN Center. The center was strategically named in a similar fashion to create confusion. Members of the WHC team have witnessed CPC volunteers standing outside the CPC, misdirecting patients with claims that the Hartford GYN center was closed or had moved. To combat this, the Hartford GYN Center joined forces with NARAL Prochoice CT, needing to rally volunteers every day to escort patients into the building for appointments and giving extra instruction on the phone about how to enter and what to avoid.

A relevant patient story: a 17 year-old patient was scheduled for a second trimester termination pregnancy termination at the Hartford Gyn Center. She was dropped off by mom for the appointment but went to the CPC office by mistake. At the front desk of the CPC, she was checked in and brought in for ultrasound. She believed she was more than 17 weeks pregnant per her last

menstrual period but, had an ultrasound done by a lay person there and was told she was only at 6 weeks. The patient left the office confused and armed with pregnancy information. Later that day, Hartford Gyn Center received a phone call from a furious mother, claiming negligence in turning her daughter away and in convincing her to have a baby. Several weeks later she ended up at the Hartford Hospital Clinic only to find that she was at 25 weeks and had missed her window for termination by choosing the wrong clinic door.

There can be no question that transparency and truth in advertising is fundamental to informed consent in medical decision making. The move to prohibit CPCs from distributing misleading information and using deceptive intervention tactics is critical for the women of our state. Our collective goal is, and should remain to be, to advocate and help bring clarity to each patient as she navigates what has become an increasingly complex health care landscape.

We offer our full support and look forward to seeing SB No. 835 pass.

Best regards,

*The Advocacy Committee for Women's Health Connecticut*