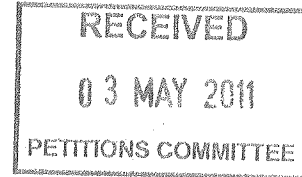




**THE HON NICOLA ROXON MP
MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND AGEING**

The Hon John Murphy MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Mr Murphy *John*

Thank you for your letter of 16 March 2011 regarding a petition on unplanned pregnancy counselling that was recently submitted for the consideration of the Standing Committee on Petitions.

I note that the petition was considered by the Committee on 21 February 2011, and under Standing Order 209 (b), as the Minister responsible for the administration of the matter raised in the petition, I am responding within 90 days of its presentation.

The legislation relating to pregnancy termination is the remit of states and territories, and each jurisdiction has different legislation governing the circumstances where pregnancy can be terminated. The Government respects the rights of the state and territory governments to manage legislation which is relevant to their jurisdictions.

The need for a termination of pregnancy is essentially a matter for the professional clinical judgement of the practitioner concerned, acting in accordance with state and territory laws. GPs have an obligation to advise patients of the possible effects, both physical and mental, that might occur as the result of any medical procedure, including termination of pregnancy. It is an individual woman's decision, made in consultation with her treating medical practitioner, whether to terminate her pregnancy.

The Australian Government recognises the importance of supporting women, their partners and families by providing non-judgmental access to information, advice and support services on all aspects of pregnancy and up to 12 months following the birth of a child.

The Government's Pregnancy, Birth & Baby Helpline (Helpline) provides a coordinated entry point to a broad range of advice and information related to pregnancy and the first 12 months of a baby's life, as well as information on other maternity related services including specialist and support services.

The helpline provides professional non-directive counselling on pregnancy options that is, maintaining the pregnancy and parenting, maintaining the pregnancy and adopting, and terminating the pregnancy. Evidence-based information on all options is provided to women, their partners and families to assist them in making informed decisions. Callers requesting specific contact information for adoption or termination services will only be provided with this information when the counsellor is confident the caller has been informed of all available options.

Callers to the Helpline are able to obtain advice relating to pregnancy and the demands of a new baby including maternal nutrition, breastfeeding, a baby's development and sleeping habits. Where appropriate, the Helpline directs people to other existing services such as the Australian Breastfeeding Association's 24-hour national helpline, or healthdirect Australia for advice from a Registered Nurse.

In addition to the professional non-directive counselling on pregnancy options, callers are able to access more general counselling in the antenatal and postnatal periods. The Helpline also directs callers experiencing perinatal depression or grief through miscarriage or stillbirth to peer support services provided through specialist telephone-based perinatal depression and grief support organisations.

I trust that the above information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

NICOLA ROXON

2 MAY 2011