

To: Senators and other personnel comprising the Senate Community Affairs' Inquiry into Transparent Advertising and Notification of Pregnancy Counselling Services Bill 2005

### **Submission to the Senate Enquiry**

This submission is intended to outline to the Senate Enquiry important reasons why the Bill quoted above must be amended to bring it into line with existing legislation pertaining to human rights legislation, as well as those statutes relating to false advertising and non-disclosure.

Dear Senators:

All forms of deceptive advertising are scurrilous in the extreme, and that this programme of funding religiously affiliated so-called 'counselling' services is being carried out by an officially secular Commonwealth Government is patently outrageous. That Government funds are being diverted to what is in effect a religiously based anti-abortion programme, masquerading as a secular and unbiased counselling service, and employing mostly untrained 'counselling' personnel of strong anti-abortion convictions to advise vulnerable women on an important decision (particularly one with such a large impact on all aspects of a woman's life), is likewise a scandalous and shameful thing.

Pregnancy, and the decision to have an abortion, are issues on which women should have full and unlimited freedom of access to ALL the facts and relevant information relating to their situation. Women have the right to an abortion if they deem it necessary. This is written into Australian law- and rightly so, as it pertains to the basic human right of freedom of choice. Women should also have the right to make their own decisions on reproductive matters free from all manner of undue suggestion, coercion, and influence of any kind, this being especially important especially where the Commonwealth Government is involved in any way, being it the provision of information or selection of counselling services.

The Commonwealth-funded program of religiously affiliated counselling before the Senate clearly violates this fundamental right; leaving counselling services in the hands of organisations strongly associated with anti-choice agendas and statements public moral disgust condemnation represents a failure to provide complete information. Such organizations have the freedom to believe abortion is immoral, as do individuals; but doing so under the aegis (and with the funds) of the Commonwealth Government is an unjustifiable act: and also it is fraudulent where affiliations are not openly declared or disclosed by 'service provider' or the Government.

I therefore enjoin members of the Community Affairs Senate Enquiry that the legislation pertaining to this issue be subjected to your thorough review and amendment in order to ensure that the final Bill conforms with current

international human rights legislation and also that said amendments are comprehensively and fully brought into line with current laws both State and Federal pertaining to false advertising, and furthermore that no more taxpayer funds be diverted to this shamefully partisan program at a time when our hospitals, civil infrastructure, schools and universities are woefully underfunded and are severely hampered in their day-to-day operations, and in the kinds of services they are able to deliver to the public. In a time of budget surplus, this is an inexcusable state of events, fiscal prudence notwithstanding.

Democratic government exists to provide the citizenry with the best quality of life possible, and for that purpose alone; freedom of information and choice are both clearly integral to quality of life. Democratic government does entail advancing the partisan agendas of a section of the community to which Government ministers may happen to be affiliated (which is like their private business). I believe a partisan approach to governing a diverse community like Australia, such as the current Government is taking on this issue (and many others in the past), ultimately benefits nobody.

At the very least, the religious affiliations of any and all counselling services affiliated with or funded by the Commonwealth government should be fully and clearly disclosed and prominently visible on any advertising. This strictly pertains to private advertising however; such programs as this, having strong religious (and therefore partisan) affiliations, should not attract ANY government funding for any reason whatsoever.

Such programs have no place in a modern, secular democratic government, only in a theocracy; which Australia is not at present, nor should it ever be, due to the diverse nature and convictions of our national community.

Lastly, although I have signed with comments the petition circulated by "Reproductive Choice Australia", I have no affiliation whatsoever with said organization. The opinions expressed and arguments advanced above are mine alone; I have submitted these for your consideration in the belief that doing so is in the best interests and general welfare of the Australian public.

Yours faithfully,

Mr. Conan Rose