



**SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE**

**Enquiry into the Transparent Advertising and Notification of
Pregnancy Counselling Services Bill 2005.**

**“A Bill for an Act to prohibit misleading or deceptive advertising or
notification of pregnancy counselling services, and for related
purposes”**

BACKGROUND

- (i) The National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW) is a national organisation which promotes the advancement of women in all spheres. The Foundation is not politically aligned.
- (ii) The Social Policy Committee of the NFAW advises the Board of Directors on relevant issues, commissions research and manages a range of activities intended to promote informed public debate on public policy issues. The Committee includes a number of women with recognised expertise and calls upon NFAW wider membership and professional advisers to assist it in formulating policy advice to the Board.
- (iii) The NFAW has maintained an interest in sexual and reproductive health issue affecting as they do the well-being of women and girls. Various policy papers and previous submissions on related subjects to Parliamentary Committees may be found on www.nfaw.org

(h) CURRENT ENQUIRY



- (i) The NFAW has noted with interest the expansion current and proposed, of opportunities for access to counselling related to pregnancy and termination services which are to be financed by the Commonwealth.
- (ii) The NFAW welcomes policy changes which will allow greater ease of access to counselling services, while at the same time stressing the importance of such services being of the highest professional competence.
- (iii) The NFAW notes that where professional counsellors are members of professional associations (such as the Australian Association of Social Workers) or their qualifications are required by Government to be formally registered (as with psychologists) there are certain guarantees of competence and a skills base. There are avenues for complaint where clients of the counselling service consider they have not received an appropriate and competent service. Marriage Guidance services financed through the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department, which provide important counselling and mediation services for individuals whose relationships are in crisis are required to maintain high professional standards, whatever the nature of the employing agency (secular or church affiliated)
- (iv) The NFAW considers that similarly high standards ought be required of any counselling service offering advice and support in the case of women considering the possibility of termination of an unwanted pregnancy, or a pregnancy where, for example, there is clinical advice that the foetus may not be viable.



- (v) In the instance of marriage guidance counselling, it is quite clear to a couple seeking counselling from a Commonwealth financed agency what is the ethical base of the agency- quite clearly an agency of the Catholic Church will have a specific ethical framework, which may not be identical to that of, say, Relationships Australia. The couple or the individual make an informed choice as to the source of counselling.
- (vi) Nothing less should be demanded of organisations financed by the Commonwealth to provide pregnancy and termination counselling.
- (vii) Advertising ought to be clear and open, and agencies whose ethical frameworks prevent them from offering options if a woman wishes to proceed to having a termination ought to be required to specifically clarify this position in all advertising and printed material. Without this, there is a risk of misleading conduct, which is unacceptable. See Attachment 1 for a statement provided to our Committee by the daughter of a Committee member on misleading behaviour.

(C) SPECIFIC ISSUES RELATING TO RURAL AUSTRALIA

- (i) The higher rates of teenage pregnancy
- (ii) The higher rates of violence against women
- (iii) The lack of services generally, which can exacerbate reproductive health issues/decisions for women there- e.g., when a doctor or pharmacist withholds information or options



- (iv) Confidentiality issues - approaching or being approached by a service which deals only/mainly with pregnancy issues may result in a high risk of invading privacy; counselling through mainstream healthcare providers may be preferable

- (v) Provisions under this or other initiatives which restrict referrals to those with special qualifications (e.g. doctors who have completed training under the Better Health Outcomes for Mental Health) or to a particular profession (e.g. psychologists) may inhibit access to needed services because of the poor uptake of specialised training or the dearth of psychologists.

CONCLUSIONS

The NFAW supports the provisions of the Bill.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marie Coleman'.

Marie Coleman

Convenor, NFAW Social Policy Committee

9/06/2006



NATIONAL
FOUNDATION
FOR AUSTRALIAN
WOMEN

ATTACHMENT 1

"A few weeks ago I arrived at Wynyard train station, on my way to work - peak hour, about 8.30 am. I exited through the main barriers, and saw 2 people, a man and a woman, selling what looked like badges and calling out "support counseling in pregnancy". I was vaguely interested, but was past them before I really took it in. However, about 10 metres further on was a girl in her school uniform, also holding a tray of badges and asking people to support counseling in pregnancy. This time, I went to seek more information.

I asked her what she was selling the badges for, and was told it was for counselling services for pregnant women. I told her I was a little confused, as I was currently pregnant (which could be seen from my 20 week bulge), but hadn't received any counselling. She said that it was to support women in the early stages of pregnancy. Again I asked for more information, "what kind of support?" It was only at this stage after several questions that the girl told me that it was anti-abortion counselling. I immediately advised her that I would never support such counselling, and walked off.

I was however a little disturbed by this, as it was not made particularly clear to the people who bought badges what exactly they were supporting. Instead, several questions had to be asked in rush hour before the ideology was revealed. It concerns me that people are being encouraged to support something of this importance by providing insufficient information (purposefully?) to them in a busy situation."

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