

SUBMISSION RE:

The Transparent Advertising and Notification of Pregnancy Counselling Services Bill 2005.

14 June 2006

There can be little argument that increased clarity in the provision of information is a good thing.

In societies which value the primacy of the individual in matters of private morality, a person has a right to make his or her decision based on as full and complete information as is possible. This Bill seeks merely to allow individuals to make decisions based on such information.

Pregnancy counselling services will incur no further costs in complying with this Bill. Further the requirements to disclose the ideological position of a pregnancy counselling service may improve the service insofar as counsellors will be encouraged to engage truthfully with those who come to them for counselling. Interaction that is based on truthfulness between parties is likely to produce better outcomes.

Non-directive Counselling

It is most important to retain the Bill's definition of non directive counselling. The distinction made by the Department that 'non-directive' may *exclude* the idea of referral to an abortion provider is an abuse of language.

A pregnancy counselling provider must help the individual to arrive at her own free decision. If the provider then does *not* refer that individual to a doctor, who then, after her/his own consultation, will provide/not provide the abortion, such pregnancy counselling service is not competent and should not be funded.

However if the pregnancy counselling service WILL NOT refer for abortion *in any circumstances, including the individual's wish*, then we all have a right to know that this is their position. Such action can not be incorporated into the term 'non directive' if the term is to retain any meaning.

Advertising

Current pregnancy counselling advertisements are deceptive by omission. The ads concentrate on the 'caring' aspects of the counselling. There is no reason to suppose that the majority of counsellors are not just that; but again, where there is a pre-established ideological agenda, deception occurs.

An individual distressed by unintended pregnancy could reasonably assume that the 'care' referred to in advertisements applies to them, the pregnant women. But the 'care' assured by such services ultimately applies to embryos. It is the 'right to life' of embryos which is of paramount concern. (It is characteristic of the anti choice movement to artificially place women' rights and the rights of embryos in opposition.)

These services routinely argue that abortion produces high rates of breast cancer and long term mental illness. If this is so, perhaps they might disclose this information in their print and electronic media advertising. If they are confident of these assertions - as science - it would be in the public interest that they do so.

Telephone:

Only non-directive services (within the definition described in the Bill) should be legally allowed to advertise under 24 hour emergency services. It is insulting and degrading to mislead a person in a state of extreme distress into believing they will receive counselling which is impartial. It is sinful (I use this word deliberately) to use taxpayers' funds to insult and degrade such a person.

Grant of Commonwealth Financial assistance:

This Bill is restrained and reasonable in only requiring disclosure of pre-established ideological positions in order to gain funding. Therefore it is equally reasonable that if a service attempts further deception, that is, it seeks to deceive the government as to its position, that it should be prevented from gaining further public funds.

Minister to report annually on payments and services:

As there is now considerable public anxiety about the integrity of pregnancy counselling itself in Australia, it is in the public interest for the Minister to disclose this information as the Bill specifies. I suggest that this section be amended to include the words "...and fertility education provider" after every use of the words 'pregnancy counselling service provider.'

In conclusion:

The broadly based hope that Australia may see fewer abortions is proper. But the best way to achieve this is to arrive at a situation where there are fewer ***unwanted pregnancies***.

I am not aware of any work that has been done in Australia that describes authoritatively why unwanted pregnancy occurs. It may be that this research is necessary to find this out.

But at present the underlying, and occasionally disclosed assumptions that women are thoughtless, women are careless, women are excessively and predatorily sexual - by the present pregnancy counselling providers and organizations with whom they are associated - undermines the Department of Health and Ageing's attempts to carry out government policy.

My position toward legal abortion is predicated on the very Western cultural ideas that individuals have autonomy over their bodies and that they have primacy over matters of private morality. My position toward this Bill is based on the reasonable expectation that taxpayers must have confidence in the services the government contracts. If the Australian Government fails to pass into law this most reasonable Bill, thereby protecting the current provider, the following assumptions may be made:

- that the Australian Government does **not** believe that women should have autonomy over their bodies
- that the Australian Government does **not** believe that women have a primary right to make decisions in matters involving private morality
- that the Australian Government supports, ethically and financially, deliberate deception by its service providers
- that the Australian Government is prepared to wear the human misery, and cost of such misery, in effectively forcing children to be born to mothers who can not, or will not, care for them adequately.

Is the ongoing funding of an organization whose *constitution prevents them* from referring for abortion (and which is starting to look increasingly like pork barrelling) worth the political fallout?

According to the Australian Social Attitudes Survey 2003 (AuSSA) 77% of respondents who held religious views believed a woman should have the right to choose whether or not she had an abortion. (This is very similar to the overall sample.) The AuSSA 2003 also surveyed 1000 Catholics and found that 72% were in support of a woman's right to choose, with only 15% disagreeing. Evangelical Protestants were the group most likely to favour restrictions, but even among them 53% were pro-choice.
http://www.arha.org.au/Resources_and_Links/abortion/What%20do%20Australians%20Think%20About%20Abortion.pdf

I am a committed Catholic. Contrary to what is currently asserted, for most of its history the Catholic Church HAS NOT regarded abortion as wrong provided it occurs before 40 days gestation. The Church has never, as far as I am aware, formally condoned deception as a means of achieving an outcome.

KATE MANNIX