

Submission
on the
Transparent Advertising and Notification of Pregnancy Counselling
Services Bill 2005
to the
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee
*Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600*

by
Pregnancy Support Group
Albury Wodonga Inc
14 Havelock Street,
Wodonga,
Victoria 3690
Ph. 02 6024 6775

Our Pregnancy Support Group provides, counselling for women experiencing a crisis-pregnancy, some post abortion counselling, practical help, referral to various agencies, friendship, support and encouragement.

Our service is linked with Pregnancy Counselling Australia, for 24 hour, seven days a week telephone counselling.

Non-Directive Counselling

Counselling is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as, Advise (person to do); recommend (thing, *that*) It is only in recent times that the notion of “non-directive counselling” has arisen. Some of our counselling is face to face in the office, but much of it is over the telephone. Any advice or recommendations given can be acted upon or completely ignored. We rarely learn the outcome of our telephone conversations. Telephone Counsellors talk to callers who could be thousands of kilometres away, whom they do not know and may never meet. Whether the counselling is directive or non-directive, the woman, or the man, or the couples who contact us are free to choose their own course of action.

The Objects of this Act:

(a) *prohibit misleading and deceptive notification and advertising of pregnancy counselling services;*

Pregnancy Counselling Australia's advertisements in the **Health and Help, 24 hour Services** section of the telephone book read,

Pregnancy Counselling Australia

Alternatives to abortion & post abortion counselling.

It is hard to know what the authors of this Bill find misleading about this entry. It plainly states that we provide alternatives to abortion.

When a telephone caller requests information about abortion services in his/her area, we say immediately and quite plainly that we do not refer for abortion. Some callers choose to hang up straight away, others choose to talk for a while. They are offered that choice and accept it.

(b) promote transparency and full choice in the notification and advertising of pregnancy counselling services;

We welcome transparency. We are up front with our description in the phone book and to our callers. We have nothing to hide. Many of our callers are seeking counselling for post abortion trauma. They are upset at the counselling they received at the abortion clinic, prior to the abortion. They tell us they felt pressured into having an abortion, or making a quick decision, or that they were lied to, especially with regard to the size and development of the foetus they aborted.

(c) improve public health;

Pregnancy Counselling Centres which do not advocate abortion are trying to improve public health. Experienced counsellors have seen and heard the consequences of abortion. They could contribute plenty of anecdotal evidence to back up the many internationally recognised studies which have documented the long term effects of Post Abortion Syndrome.

Some of these include;

Suicidal thoughts or attempts

Depression

Alcohol and/or drug abuse

Eating disorders

Abusive relationships

Unnecessary risk taking

Repeat abortions

Marriage and family breakdown

Child neglect and abuse.

Sexual dysfunction

(d) minimise the difficulties associated with obtaining advice to deal with unplanned pregnancy.

How can removing some Pregnancy Counselling and Pregnancy Support groups from public availability IMPROVE a woman's ability to obtain advice or deal with an unplanned pregnancy? This just does not make sense.

Additional Comments

Not all women who phone 24 hour Pregnancy Counselling lines are looking for abortion services. Many want to keep the baby and are looking for practical support. Some are seeking reassurance with other problems or want a referral.

This Bill appears to assume that abortion is the only reason women phone a Pregnancy Counselling service, and therefore does a disservice to women by also trying to limit the availability of these other services.

Women who have had an abortion and regret it, often express an aversion to the abortionist, his staff, and those who facilitated the abortion. If we referred for an abortion, even implying that it was acceptable under some circumstances, we would lose our credibility with these women. They would then be abandoned by a society, which regards abortion as a right, not as a loss or a traumatic event. They would have no where else to turn to for assistance. Many callers will tell us they tried various agencies, but have had their concerns dismissed as trivial or non-existent. They are relieved to find someone who understands and cares.

Recommendation

Please advise the Senate to reject this Bill.

- i) it is based on a misunderstanding of the term "counselling".
- ii) women, men, grandparents approach Pregnancy Counselling for services other than abortion and should not be denied this assistance, because it cannot be advertised, in the Health and Help section of the telephone book..
- iii) women who are suffering after an abortion need somewhere to go for help. Where else can they go? Are there any "pro-choice" agencies that acknowledge the reality of Post Abortion Syndrome?
- iv) the practical and material assistance that Pregnancy Counselling Centres provide needs to be valued and encouraged, by a society that recognises that there are too many abortions already, rather than undermined and limited.

Jane Munro