

Submission

Inquiry into Transparent Advertising and Notification of Pregnancy Counselling Services Bill 2005

From Salt Shakers Christian Ethics Action group

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The proposals put forward in the Bill regarding advertising of pregnancy counseling services are unreasonable and we recommend that the Senate Community Affairs Committee does not support the proposals.

Firstly, a pregnancy counselling centre should be able to provide counselling for pregnancy without having to declare that they do not refer for abortions. It should be able to openly provide support for the pregnant woman without such draconian measures as qualifying advertisements with messages about not referring for 'terminations'.

A pregnancy counseling centre should be able to discuss the options available to a woman. This should include advice on support available to continue with the pregnancy. The new counselling services approved and funded by the federal government will indeed provide such advice to a woman.

This counselling may at times even include the possible discussion of the option of an abortion. But the centre should also be able to explain the harm that can result from such a choice – such as medical complications, post abortion trauma and breast cancer, all of which are medical facts.

The case of 'Ellen', a woman who received a financial payout from a legal claim which was made when she suffered depression and emotional trauma after an abortion at a Melbourne hospital, should mean that every counselling service should be required to inform the woman of such risks. It was found that the hospital had not informed 'Ellen' about the possible risks.

Informed consent surrounding abortion is one of the much needed reforms surrounding abortion.

Second, a ‘pregnancy counselling centre’ should not be expected to refer for abortions – in fact since abortion is a medical procedure this would normally be the province of a doctor rather than a counseling service to make such a referral.

In addition, it should not be assumed that such a service would necessarily offer advice about abortions, even though the full range of options may be discussed in the course of a counselling session.

Each woman is different and has different needs – for some abortion may be an option, but for many others they will choose to phone a ‘Pregnancy Counseling Service’ because they want HELP with their pregnancy.

Third, if the woman is inclined to have an abortion there are many abortion services advertised in the phone book which advocate abortion.

A woman may specifically choose to contact a pregnancy counseling centre for help to continue her pregnancy and may well be offended and upset by being told of her ‘right’ to have an abortion.

Ultimately it is the decision of the woman as to what particular service she consults when she finds herself pregnant.

After all, it is not as though the particular service complained about in the Second Reading Speech [Pregnancy Counselling Australia] calls itself an ‘Abortion Counselling Centre’ and then does not refer for abortions – that might be able to be said to be misleading, but it can hardly be ‘misleading’ to advertise pregnancy help and provide that service..

Fourth, pregnancy counseling centres aim to look after the health of the mother and the baby. As a Christian organisation, we believe that life starts at conception and is precious. We thus maintain that services should be able to provide such support and be advertised as a health service.

The second reading speech of Senator Stott Despoja says

”my bill would ensure that telephone directories such as the White Pages can only include non-directive pregnancy counselling services in their 24 hour health and help call pages of these directories”.

It is ironical that the proposed bill attempts to exclude pregnancy counselling centres that focus on the health and well being of the mother and the baby from being advertised in the ‘Health and help’ sections of the directories.

Instead it is proposed that any centre advertised there MUST refer for abortion – in other words to propose – and possibly even advocate – for the death of the child.

This is quite incongruous.

Fifth, one should not have to advertise what one does not do.

If a shop sells tyres but not ice-creams, they should not have to advertise ‘We do not sell ice-creams’.

Similarly if a shop sells red jumpers but not blue trousers, they should not have to specify what they do not sell. If the customer goes to the shop and doesn’t find blue trousers they are free to go to another shop to look for additional options.

In conclusion, we recommend that the Committee does not endorse the Proposals contained in the **TRANSPARENT ADVERTISING AND NOTIFICATION OF PREGNANCY COUNSELLING SERVICES BILL 2005**.

In addition, we believe that it is far more important that all organizations, doctors and abortion clinics either referring for or performing abortions be required to provide appropriate counselling and fully inform the woman about the possible risk factors – including medical complications, emotional consequences of post abortion trauma and the risk of breast cancer.

The current ‘counselling’ provided by abortion clinics is woefully inadequate and does not inform the woman of the consequences.

In addition, each pregnant woman should be given the opportunity of seeing their baby on an ultrasound, and shown pictures of the developing child, so that they can more fully appreciate the nature of the pregnancy.

We recommend this course of action to the Committee and the government.