

**Submission to the
Senate Community Affairs Committee Inquiry
Transparent Advertising and Notification of Pregnancy Counselling Services Bill
2005**

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My name is Laura Armitage. I am the Women's Officer in the La Trobe University Student Representative Council. I am writing this Senate submission to try and convey to you the great importance that legitimate and autonomous counselling and support is for women in distress particularly with unexpected pregnancies. I feel that Natasha Stott Despoja's Private Member Bill – 'Transparent Advertising and Notification of Pregnancy Counselling Service Bill 2005' is essential to ensuring that pregnancy support services will be providing unbiased and legally acceptable counselling and advice.

While the Federal Government has decided to dedicate funding towards pregnancy support services on call 24 hours a day, and Medicare rebates for those women that choose to use these services; there needs to be a check on these particular services to make sure they are ethical and provide unbiased services.

The autonomy of women is of the utmost importance and this means they need legitimate facilitation to make an informed and well developed decision that suits each individual. There is great concern that the Federal Government's interest is reducing the rate of foetal termination will result in counselling services that are provided primarily by Right to Life groups. The problem that this has produced in the past has been misleading, and deceptive advertising and providing false counselling. These services have given false claims such as; abortion leads to breast cancer later in life, infertility, and post abortion grief. These claims are proven to be untrue; information put out by the World Health Organisation maintains that there is "...no consistent effect of first trimester induced abortion upon a women's risk of breast cancer later in life."

A press release put out by Reproductive Choice Australia affirms the need for legitimate counselling and non-state sponsored manipulation. While everybody is entitled to their own beliefs and opinions it is not for either the state or a counsellor to manipulate a vulnerable women causing "...emotional and psychological damage..."

On the 2nd of March 2006, the Federal Government announced a \$51 million dollar initiative to provide two pregnancy programmes. The first a 24 hour National Pregnancy Support Telephone Helpline; and the second a Medicare payment for pregnancy counselling. By supporting Senator Stott Despoja's Private Member Bill you will ensure that the counselling offered to these women that find themselves in extremely stressful, emotional and heartbreaking circumstances, will be able to get the support and find the autonomous direction that they seek.

We live in a liberal-democratic society, concerned with individual rights and the respect for each person. Please provide the regulation and check on Pregnancy Support Services that this bill will provide. Each and every women needs to be able to make a well informed and personal decision without judgment or bias.