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Committee Secretary
Community Affairs Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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**RE: INQUIRY INTO TRANSPARENT ADVERTISING AND
NOTIFICATION OF PREGNANCY COUNSELLING SERVICES BILL 2005**

Dear Committee Secretary,

Do Not Be Quiet is an e-zine created to publicise issues relating to gender. From its inception in December 2003, *Do Not Be Quiet* has campaigned against the misleading representation of pregnancy counselling services in Australian telephone and online directories.

Do Not Be Quiet has attempted to focus attention on Pregnancy Counselling Australia which is run by Right to Life Australia, though it purports to be a professional counselling service for women.

The campaign has consisted of petitioning Sensis, writing to politicians, (including Senator Stott Despoja), working with other key women's organisations and publicising the campaign on the website. As editor of *Do Not Be Quiet*, I support the nomination of this Bill and welcome the Committee's request for submissions.

I first learnt of this phone number through my volunteer work at a women's telephone service. Callers would ask me for a more appropriate referral following their experiences after calling Pregnancy Counselling Australia, the number for which can be found in the 24 Hour Emergency listings of the Australian White Pages.

In one instance, a caller expressed her anger, having discovered that, far from receiving the independent and compassionate advice she sought, the 'counsellor' merely spoke graphically about abortion. Another caller was confused because she was not given the information she asked for; the person on the other end seemed to have her own agenda.

The call that finally pushed me into action, however, was from a young woman whose friend had called Pregnancy Counselling Australia. The caller was concerned for her friend, who was so distressed after the experience she had then refused to seek medical help from anywhere else. Not once did I hear from anyone that they had received help when using the Right to Life number—all required a referral to a legitimate counselling service.

I first wrote to Sensis, the company that produces the White Pages, in October 2003 informing them that Pregnancy Counselling Australia was run by Right to Life Australia. The General Manager replied that the listing had recently been amended to its current form, as it had previously been listed under another name which had not accurately represented the service. The name, "Pregnancy Counselling Australia", was a name Sensis felt adhered to their criteria to be listed in the 24 Hour Emergency listings. At the beginning of 2005, I wrote again to Sensis requesting they change this listing and provided them with a petition. Again, they reiterated that Pregnancy Counselling Australia adhered to their criteria, even though they had recently amended it by adding a sub-listing.

It is critical that the national phone books, the primary source of emergency phone numbers in Australia, have governmental regulations to ensure accurate information to the public.

This listing is purposely misleading, yet current legislation is inadequate to regulate these types of services. Pregnancy Counselling Australia does not fall under the regulations of the *Trade Practices Act* because it is not a business. It also does not provide a medical service, although it purports to give medical advice to the public. The people who answer the phones are unsupervised and inadequately trained to be counsellors, the key selection criterion being their anti-abortion stance. Right to Life, an anti-choice organisation, is unlikely to give unbiased, independent counselling to women. It is unethical to mislead callers and these types of services traumatise and isolate women most in need of support.

The Bill does not go far enough to ensure that women's health is a key priority for the Government. Only medical, non-directive organisations (rather than political organisations) should receive government funding.

Although the focus of this Bill is misleading advertising, it is difficult to separate it from the subject of abortion. Perhaps it should not be separated, as both are issues focused on women's ability to make choices about their health. In this respect, the Government should show clear support for women by not hampering access to information and acknowledging that no one is more suited to make choices regarding a woman's health than herself.

Kind regards,



Erin Dolan
Editor, Do Not Be Quiet