

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

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We are two Monash University students, Zoe Edwards and Nyssa Hadgraft, studying Deans Scholars Arts and Deans Scholars Science respectively. We have taken the time to

write a submission for this inquiry as we feel deeply concerned with the current situation that denies women information and informed choice and strongly support South Australian Senator Natasha Stott Despoja's Private Member Bill- Transparent Advertising and Notification of Pregnancy Counselling Services Bill 2005.

Due to the fact that the services provided by pregnancy counselling organisations in Australia are free, the Trade Practices Act does not require organisations to be truthful or unbiased in their 'advice'. This can result in women not being informed of the whole truth, and potentially falling victim to groups who – due to religious agendas - demonise the option of abortion. It is vital that something be done to change this situation. It is a worrying situation when women who are undergoing difficult and life changing decisions, can be bullied into certain choices. A woman making these decisions needs support, not proselytisation.

The federal government currently spends over \$240,000 a year funding anti-choice organisations such as Australian Federation of Pregnancy Support Services (AFPSS), which preach an adoption versus pregnancy message and avoid discussion of terminations. This is while organisations such as Australia- Children by Choice and the Bessie Smyth Foundation that actually inform women of all of their available pregnancy options receive no government funding.

Pregnancy counselling services are an important tool for women at an emotionally challenging time of their life, and should be unbiased and supportive. For certain supposed support services to manipulate women in such a fragile state is completely immoral. Further, this is detrimental to pregnant women's mental health and wellbeing, and potentially damaging to the child she might not abort. Every child born in Australia should be a wanted child! Women should be informed of the options, for their own wellbeing and for the wellbeing of the next generation of Australians.

We believe the integrity and professionalism which is applied to the counselling profession in all other aspects of mental health support should be applied to that of pregnancy counselling. Counsellors have an ethical obligation to be non directive and unbiased; the government has a moral obligation to regulate the industry to reflect this.

It is imperative that the government supports this Private Members Bill to ensure that when women reach out for a 'counsellor', they can feel safe in the knowledge that the advice they receive allows them to make the best choice for their well being. It is frightening that a woman might make a decision that so massively impacts their lives, without knowing all the options or getting accurate information from government-funded services.