

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

Submission in Relation to the *Transparent Advertising and Notification of Pregnancy Counselling Services Bill 2005*

Please accept my in response to the invitation advertised in The Australian 21 June 2006.

I am distressed to read the contents of Senator Stott-Despoja's Bill and the press reports on this issue.

Today there is little enough support for young women who find themselves pregnant unexpectedly; it would be a tragedy to remove or undermine the volunteer organisations that are there to support these young women no matter what choice they ultimately make.

My Story

I moved to Canberra from Sydney in 1970 as a young public servant. In a matter of months, I found myself pregnant to a young man of twenty; I was a little older. We had much in common and similar backgrounds, but I did not want to rush into marriage, nor see it as my only option.

My GP referred me to a Social Worker at the Canberra Hospital, whom I met with on several occasions over a period of months. She also met with my then boyfriend and father of my baby.

During a visit to Sydney, I also explored the possibility of adoption and visited St Anthony's Home at Croydon. During that visit I realized that I did not want my child to be one of the 'surrendered generations'! I knew I wanted my child. I was then about 5 months pregnant and my love for the baby had grown with my pregnancy.

After due consideration, boyfriend and I did decide to marry and were advised and assisted in this by the then Father Patrick Power, now Bishop Power. Our son is now himself the father of two delightful little girls.

I continued my career in the public service and retired as a Senior Officer Grade B, having worked on Employment and Youth Programs and as a Senior Consultant to the ABS on Questionnaire Design.

Pregnancy Support

When I retired, I completed a training course conducted by the Federation of Pregnancy Support Services and worked as a volunteer counsellor. I found the course material to be comprehensive, relevant, current and balanced. In fact, I discovered that they trained the volunteers in 'neutral questioning techniques', which I had used and trained others to use,

to evaluate questionnaires or survey instruments. These techniques also form the basis of 'non-directive counselling'.

These organisations are ideologically pro-life and consequently they provide a vital alternative for those young women who want to find a way to keep their babies. These organisations advertise as 'Pregnancy Support' and do what they advertise, which is to support pregnancy.

I am more concerned about those organisations which are listed in the 'White Pages' under the heading *Pregnancy Termination Services* and claim to provide counselling as one of their services. Counselling provided by a termination service with a financial interest in the outcome, could hardly be seen to be independent.

Pregnancy Support Services do not refer for abortion. This is explained to the client who wants to explore that option. Such clients are told that the information is readily available in the phone book and that no referral is necessary. The client is also told that it is her choice and that she is welcome to return for any assistance she wants in the future. In fact, many who do choose to abort their babies do return for 'grief counselling'. Many of the volunteers I met at my course are there to help these young women with quiet compassion and do so on an on-going basis.

Among my fellow volunteers, I did not observe any judgemental, condemnatory or negative attitudes toward pregnant women, quite the reverse. Additionally, it is my understanding that reference to any religion-based behavioural standard is not permitted.

Conclusion

Many young women are being pressured into having abortions without having had the opportunity that I had to realize that they love and want their babies.

Grants to Pregnancy Support Services are an investment in the future of this nation. Australia currently loses up to 100,000 of its potential citizens per year to abortion. If Pregnancy Support Services are not available to assist with viable alternatives, this figure will undoubtedly increase. If anti-child attitudes proliferate, we may need to employ 'child catchers' reminiscent of the character played by Sir Robert Helpmann in 'Chitty-Chitty Bang Bang'?

I urge you to consider this issue carefully – remember that for every child that a mother is assisted to keep, we are also assisting their future descendants. Those who assisted me thirty six years ago so far have to their credit my two sons and two granddaughters.