



Testimony on Connecticut SB 835

By Mary Szoch, M.Ed.

Connecticut SB 835, *An Act Concerning Deceptive Advertising Practices of Limited Services Pregnancy Centers*, masquerades as a bill preventing deceptive advertising. In reality, it is an attempt to silence Connecticut’s pro-life pregnancy centers, in violation of their First Amendment rights. This bill also makes it harder for women who are unexpectedly pregnant to know what all their choices are, and it places the state in the position of promoting abortion over childbirth.

Many generally applicable laws at the state and federal level already prevent deceptive advertising. What makes SB 835 unique is that it deliberately—and unjustly—singles out pro-life pregnancy centers as the only organizations required to prevent advertising they know “or reasonably should know to be deceptive.” Nothing in the bill prevents abortion practices from engaging in deceptive advertising practices. For example, Planned Parenthood—whose very name implies that a pregnant woman visiting the clinic will receive balanced information regarding the resources available to her if she would like to parent—is not obligated in any way to clarify in their advertising that their core mission is expanding abortion.¹ Pro-life pregnancy centers are targeted for one reason only—to stifle their speech.

If this were just another deceptive advertising law, it would not target an ideologically unified group of service providers who take a position on one of the most controversial topics in the country. SB 835’s

¹ Alexandra DeSanctis, “Planned Parenthood’s President Admits Abortion Is Group’s ‘Core Mission,’” *National Review*, January 8, 2019, accessed February 10, 2021, <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/planned-parenthoods-president-admits-abortion-is-groups-core-mission/>.

vague wording “whether by statement or omission” allows the state to decide which words a pro-life pregnancy center omitted. This is an intimidation practice with the prevention of pro-life speech as its goal. It is unconstitutional.

In 2018, California had a law that forced pro-life pregnancy centers to 1) advertise that the state offered free abortions and 2) post a notice stating they were not medical providers. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that California’s law was unconstitutional and prohibited the state from directly demanding this speech. Although SB 835 is not directly demanding speech from pro-life pregnancy centers, through the vague wording “by statement or omission”, it is indirectly attempting to force pregnancy centers to make those same statements. The Supreme Court has already ruled this as unconstitutional.

Singling out pro-life pregnancy centers for heavy fines because they do not provide or refer for abortions compels them to advertise in a way that significantly limits their potential clients. Many women who find themselves unexpectedly pregnant feel afraid, alone, and unsure of where to turn. Pro-life pregnancy centers do not coerce women into giving birth. Rather, they give a woman all the information available to her and allow the woman to make her own decision, knowing that she can always turn to the pro-life pregnancy center for support.

Unlike abortion practices, pro-life pregnancy clinics do not make money when a client chooses life. In 2019, pro-life pregnancy centers provided \$270 million in services at virtually no charge. They provided services to women regardless of whether they chose life or abortion, offering more than 21,000 women post-abortion healing services.²

² Charlotte Lozier Institute, “Pro-life Pregnancy Centers Served 2 Million People with Essential Medical, Education and Support Services in 2019,” press release, October 21, 2020, <https://lozierinstitute.org/pro-life-pregnancy-centers-served-2-million-people-with-essential-medical-education-and-support-services-in-2019/>.

Pro-life pregnancy centers do not exist to make a profit; they exist because they care about women and their children. According to a Guttmacher Institute study, women most frequently choose to have abortions because having a child would “interfere with a woman’s education, work or ability to care for dependents (74%); that she could not afford a baby now (74%), and that she did not want to be a single mother or was having relationship problems (48%).”³ The resources offered by pro-life pregnancy centers help women rise above and change these circumstances. The support of pro-life pregnancy centers empowers women to choose life for their children.

There is no good reason to attack centers that have such a positive impact on society. Doing so places the state in the position of promoting abortion practices—who stand to profit from a woman’s decision to have an abortion—above centers offering women the tools they need to choose life.

SB 835 is unconstitutional, but more importantly, SB 835 would harm the women of Connecticut. I urge you to vote against it.

³ Finer, Lawrence B., et al. “Reasons U.S. Women Have Abortions: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives.” *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, Guttmacher.org, Sept. 2005, www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/pubs/psrh/full/3711005.pdf?bcs-agent-scanner=c867a639-adca-104b-8dff-79dc51ca04df.