

Good morning and thank you Senate committee for the opportunity to share with you today as the Executive Director of a Pregnancy Resource Center that exists to support women and families on our community. With abortion being an extremely emotional, and even more so lately political issue, it is more important than ever to have resources that provide women a safe, caring and non-judgemental setting to explore their options and to learn of support for alternatives to an abortion. My testimony's purpose is to address the proposed section of Senate Bill S.37 that specifically targets pregnancy centers around concerns of deceptive practices and misleading information and to give you a clearer picture of the important work that pregnancy centers do.

As there was various testimony yesterday morning in this committee that specifically addressed concerns about pregnancy centers, I am grateful for this opportunity to respond to those concerns and to give you facts and information directly from a pregnancy center. I will note that I have made numerous attempts over the last 5 years to meet with yesterdays first two witnesses or their offices, and any offers have been rejected. As of yet, I have either been ignored or only received accusations of hearsay and rhetoric about pregnancy centers that have not been directly addressed with us.

Having reviewed the witnesses written testimony, as well as listening to the recordings, I will respond and demonstrate to you not only the false and misleading statements by the witnesses, but also demonstrate the value and importance of pregnancy centers. Each pregnancy center is an independent organization so I can only verify information on my center in Middlebury, but I do know the directors of the other six centers in VT and believe they follow similar practices.

Allow me to begin:

It was stated in the powerpoint that the “goal [of pregnancy centers] is to prevent what they call “abortion-minded” women from obtaining abortions.”, and that the “tactic is to delay women from making pre-natal appointments in order to delay a decision to terminate.” With respect for everyone's right to make their own choices, we offer information on abortion as well as other pregnancy choices so they can make a well-informed decision. We always emphasize for a pregnant woman the importance of prenatal care as soon as possible and even provide them with free prenatal vitamins before they leave. No pressure, no coercion and no judgement. We don't profit from their decision and some have even returned after terminating because they felt it was a safe place to come. In regards to later testimony to the concern about receiving proper prenatal care as early as possible, we often get calls from women seeking confirmation of a pregnancy with ultrasound because they are not able to get into their ob/gyn for weeks. We are clear that we do not provide prenatal care, but can confirm a viable pregnancy and gestational

age. They appreciate being able to have peace of mind and know that they are still in fact pregnant.

Regarding deceptive advertising, our center is committed to 100 percent transparency in all marketing practices and client interactions. We do not provide or refer for abortions and we are careful to disclose this fact before setting up any appointments. Clients must also sign an authorization of services form that clearly states this fact. We strive to build long-term, supportive relationships within our community which is only possible if we treat every person with the highest standard of care and excellence. The women who come to our center want to explore their options and make an informed decision. Many tell us they were so thankful someone took the time to listen to them. Most see abortion as their only option and are eager to hear of the support they can receive if they choose to carry to term. Don't we want women to have choices?

As far as rebranding from being called a pregnancy center to being a women's center, the decision was to be more inclusive as we provide supportive services that go well beyond pregnancy. We have had women say they felt a little funny coming to a pregnancy center when they weren't pregnant. We build long term relationships with our clients if they choose, walking alongside them in parenting, relationship issues, even raising funds and setting up a meal train for a client who needed an open heart surgery. We have even been known to assist in installing a car battery when a client was overwhelmed!

In the powerpoint testimony it was stated that pregnancy centers are "non-profit organizations that function as the backbone of the antiabortion movement" and that the resources of volunteer hours and donations to pregnancy centers far outweigh any other pro-life activity. I can only see this as a compliment to the pro-lifers who provide practical, feet on the ground support to those who often are choosing abortion because they feel they have no other choices. Again, as I have shared with you testimonies from actual clients, our centers offer resources and support that is certainly not offered at abortion clinics and demonstrates a compassionate and caring environment to empower women to truly have choices. A much more commendable use of resources than just fighting laws...but even that is necessary at times as I am here in that capacity today!

Statistics were presented that stated that pregnancy centers far outnumber abortion clinics. Again, that seems to indicate that this is a needed service, and especially as pregnancy centers such as those in VT receive no government funding, but are fully funded by individuals and churches in the community. I know that was a question asked yesterday by this committee. Our centers save tax payers thousands of dollars each year as we provide our supportive services for free.

I will briefly address the **Post Abortion Stress Syndrome** mentioned as well in the PowerPoint.. We do not use that term. We DO offer support for any pregnancy loss whether elective termination or miscarriage. As mentioned earlier, we have had women return after a termination to get support from us. Don't we want to offer support for those who do struggle with their decision or loss?

Abortion Pill Reversal was also brought up yesterday. Our licensed medical director supports a woman's choice to have progesterone prescribed to provide an opportunity to try to save the pregnancy if she would like. Progesterone is the natural hormone in a woman's body that is necessary to nurture and sustain a pregnancy, frequently prescribed for high risk pregnancies. It restores what the first abortion pill depletes. No studies have been completed to refute this and there are over 4,000 children alive today because of this procedure.

What I heard from yesterday's testimony that was probably the most concerning was that pregnancy centers function "under the guise of being medical facilities" which I know for The Women's Center and the other pregnancy centers in VT is an absolute false accusation. Medical services provided by our center are provided in accordance with all applicable laws, and in accordance with pertinent medical standards, under the supervision and direction of a licensed physician. All scans are carried out by an RN trained in sonography and are reviewed by our medical director, a licensed OB/GYN. Our medical director reviews and approves all of the medical information that we provide clients, including the risks of abortion, as well as approving our medical policies and procedures. Our ultrasound services are in fact diagnostic and provide confirmation of a viable pregnancy, the location of the fetus or embryo and determine the gestational age. This information about a pregnancy becomes more important as medication abortion becomes more readily available and no longer requires a clinic visit. With telehealth abortion there is no ultrasound to confirm the gestational age, which is crucial as it is not a safe procedure after 10-12 weeks. LMP's are many times unknown and therefore with no ultrasound to confirm, women are at risk. As this committee addresses concerns of deception, I was very concerned when I attended a presentation last year by yesterday's first witness where a website was shared about how to obtain abortion pills via mail. The website stated that if one took the abortion pill and had to go to the ER, NOT to tell the physician that they took the medication abortion since their symptoms would resemble a miscarriage and they didn't need to know.

Data privacy was mentioned as a concern because we collect client information and are accused of sharing that information. We are HIPAA compliant and hold all client information in strict and absolute confidence. Information is only disclosed as required by law.

I will briefly address yesterday's testimony regarding reported clients who have claim they have felt deceived by The Women's Center, have felt coerced, or who have received inaccurate ultrasound results. First of all, I would expect that a complaint would have been made or filed somewhere if this were true. We offer every client an opportunity to provide feedback and

invite them to review us on platforms such as Google. At this point, we have only received 100% positive reviews and client satisfaction. The only exceptions are a few Google reviews made by individuals who have no verification of ever being a client at our Center. I have included in the provided materials review comments collected from actual clients from the last year or two. Can I ask if this committee is aware of any filed complaints about any of the Vermont pregnancy centers?

If I could make a suggestion, out of concern to protect Vermonters from deception and misleading advertising, perhaps as legislators, you might consider a bill to include ALL organizations that offer services to the public and not single out pregnancy centers as is presented in S.37.

In conclusion, I am happy to report that the Pregnancy Resource Center in Middlebury, VT has been aiding Addison County women and families for nearly 40 years. In 2022 alone we provided services to 90 individuals. Women come to us for the abundance of services we do provide, which include: Pregnancy diagnosis, prenatal health classes, post-abortion care, diapers, vitamins, baby clothing, strollers, furniture, and other materials. This is a vital resource in our community that needs to be protected and not be targeted because of differences of view. As I was encouraged a few years ago by a leader of a community organization in Middlebury after being verbally attacked in a public event, we may have ideological differences, but we are all here to support women and families. Thank you for your time and consideration today.

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