

23 February 2019

Vermont State Senator Ruth Hardy
P.O. Box 343
East Middlebury, Vermont 05740

Dear Senator Hardy,

Re: **Crisis Pregnancy Centers in Vermont**

We are writing to you as a collective of concerned students from Middlebury College. Members of our group have been pursuing various courses of reproductive justice activism during our time as undergraduates. At present, we feel it is necessary to combine our efforts and draw legislative attention to the issue of Crisis Pregnancy Centers in the state of Vermont. The biased practices of these centers, their lack of medical knowledge and authority, and their history of targeting vulnerable women make them a threat to public health. We ask that you and your colleagues address the public health crisis of medically inaccurate and biased reproductive health providers in our state via legislative action.

Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs) are pro-life organizations whose mission is to prevent as many abortions as possible.¹ While some CPCs are privately funded and operated, many belong to national pro-life networks such as Care Net, Heartbeat International, and the National Institute of Family and Life Advocates (NIFLA).² Thus, they have access to a wealth of resources to sustain their deceitful practices. CPCs significantly outnumber abortion providers; in 2013, it was estimated that there were as many as 4,000 CPCs in the United States alone. That same year, there were approximately 1,800 abortion providers in the United States.³ In some states there is only one remaining abortion clinic, forcing women to travel farther and farther to access necessary care.⁴

CPCs intentionally target vulnerable populations of women who may be less able to access reproductive health resources. CPCs often operate out of offices near hospitals or Planned Parenthoods in order to seem like legitimate healthcare providers.⁵ Furthermore, CPCs intentionally have misleading names, chosen to suggest impartiality and medical expertise.⁶ A CPC in Middlebury--the Pregnancy Resource Center of Addison County--is located on Route 7

¹ Chen, Alice X (2013). Crisis Pregnancy Centers: Impeding the Right to Informed Decision Making. *Cardozo Journal of Law & Gender*, 19, 935. (Robert Pearson is often awarded credit for “the idea behind CPCs.” He is quoted as saying, in 1994, that, “A killer, who in this case is the girl who wants to kill her baby, has no right to information that will help her kill her baby. Therefore, when she calls and says, ‘Do you do abortion?’ we do not tell her, No, we don’t do abortions.”)

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, 937.

⁴ Ingber, Sasha (2018). 1 Abortion Clinic Remains Open in Missouri, Following New State Requirements. *NPR.org*. (In Missouri, there is only one clinic--a Planned Parenthood in St. Louis--that provides abortions. “For some patients, that means they may face up to 400 miles round-trip to seek abortion services.”)

⁵ Crisis Pregnancy Centers Lie: The Insidious Threat to Reproductive Freedom. *NARAL Pro-Choice America* (2015), 5. (“By locating near clinics that provide comprehensive information and services, CPCs purposefully try to confuse patients into mistakenly entering their deceitful clinics.”)

⁶ Chen, Crisis Pregnancy Centers, 951. (Misleading names include, “Women’s Health First, Inc., Unplanned Pregnancy, Family Planners, AAA Pregnancy Problem, and Options.”)

near the entrance to Middlebury Union High School. The location of CPCs is aimed at encouraging women--often low-income women, women of color, and/or young women--seeking reproductive healthcare to enter CPCs rather than legitimate abortion providers.⁷ CPCs then attempt to dissuade these women from pursuing alternate resources or care.

The information presented at CPCs is biased, ill-informed, and medically inaccurate. In 2006, Representative Henry Waxman, a Democrat from California, released a congressional investigative report that highlighted the lies frequently told by CPCs.⁸ The report investigated 23 facilities, 20 of which “provided false or misleading information by claiming--contrary to the scientific evidence--that there is a link between abortion and breast cancer, that abortion harms future fertility or that abortion increases a woman’s risk of suffering severe mental health problems.”⁹ The Pregnancy Resource Center of Addison County offers visitors seeking pregnancy counseling a pamphlet containing similar misleading and inaccurate information.

Vermont’s Attorney General, T.J. Donovan, has the power to halt the deceptive tactics used by CPCs across the state. In 2002, New York’s acting Attorney General--Eliot Spitzer--reached an agreement with a CPC in New York state. The agreement required the pregnancy center “to inform visitors that it does not provide abortion referrals, that it is not a licensed medical facility, and that its pregnancy tests are identical to over-the-counter tests.”¹⁰ CPCs often hide their pro-life bias so as not to frighten clients away at the door. Mandating that CPCs acknowledge their lack of authority in issues of reproductive healthcare/abortion would allow women seeking accurate information on their pregnancy options to leave clinics prior to undergoing ultrasounds, pregnancy tests, and counseling sessions rooted in shame. While Vermont has not adopted the Uniform Deceptive Trade Practices Act, anti-deception legislation may be enacted against CPCs with similar results.

CPCs often pose as healthcare resources, yet aren’t held to the same standards as legitimate medical providers. Vermont must mandate that CPCs adhere to standards in the health profession--ultrasound technicians operating at CPCs should be required to be licensed by a professional certifying body.¹¹ Furthermore, if CPCs were regulated as medical clinics they would be penalized for distributing false health information.¹² These measures would help ensure that women who enter CPCs are not subject to deception and manipulation.

Vermont’s legislature must take action to regulate CPCs and prevent the viral spread of misinformation and fear-mongering among fake clinics. We urge you and your colleagues to employ harsher anti-deception statutes against CPCs and regulate CPCs as medical clinics. Women are entitled to accurate health information and judgment-free, compassionate care. We hope to see Vermont become a leader in the fight for reproductive justice and compassionate reproductive healthcare.

Sincerely,

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Crisis Pregnancy Centers Offer Misleading Information on Abortion Risks. *Gutmacher.org* (2006)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Chen, Crisis Pregnancy Center, 953.

¹¹ Ibid, 957.

¹² Ibid.

The Undersigned Student-Activists of Middlebury College

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