

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6452

As of January 28, 2010

Title: An act relating to limited service pregnancy centers.

Brief Description: Concerning limited service pregnancy centers.

Sponsors: Senators Tom, Kohl-Welles, Kline, McDermott, Marr, Keiser, Prentice, Ranker, Eide and Pridemore.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 1/27/10.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Staff: Rhoda Donkin (786-7465)

Background: Crisis pregnancy centers are numerous in Washington State and can be found in the yellow pages of the phone book under Abortion Alternatives. These facilities typically offer free pregnancy tests and counseling for women who suspect they are pregnant. These clinics receive personal health information from women, and provide information about sex, pregnancy, contraception, adoption, and abortion. These clinics do not provide abortion or referral to abortion services. They are not regulated as medical facilities in the state because they do not provide medical services to pregnant women. Many of these clinics are associated with churches or religious organizations. There is concern these facilities may not be fully disclosing their anti-abortion focus to prospective clients. There is further concern they are communicating misleading or false information regarding abortion and that health information about women may be disseminated without their consent.

Summary of Bill: Limited service pregnancy center is defined as an organization that does not provide prenatal care, comprehensive birth control services, abortion or referrals for abortion. All reproductive health information provided in these centers must be medically and scientifically accurate as currently defined in statute.

Limited service pregnancy centers must disclose immediately that they do not provide abortion or comprehensive birth control services, referrals for abortions or comprehensive birth control services, or medical care for pregnant women. This must be communicated understandably upon initial contact with a person seeking services, and in writing posted at the main entry door of the facility.

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Limited service pregnancy centers must inform a woman when she is about to receive an over-the-counter pregnancy test, and allow her to self-administer it. Regardless of how a pregnancy test is processed, the results must be provided in writing to the client immediately after it is completed.

When a limited service pregnancy center collects health information from a person seeking services, this may not be disclosed without the individual's written authorization. Health information recorded concerning clients will be made available to them promptly, but no later than 15 working days after receiving the request.

Violation of the conditions of this act are considered violations of the Consumer Protection Act.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The goal of the bill is to protect medical privacy and make sure that medical information is accurate and not philosophical. These centers use inaccurate information to frighten women who are already in crisis because they don't want to be pregnant. The facilities target young, low income women who are particularly vulnerable. The information regarding birth control, sexually transmitted disease, and abortion, is false and misleading. The centers withhold test results, which is agonizing for women who fear pregnancy. This makes women more susceptible to their scare tactics. Personal health information is not kept private. This bill is necessary to protect women from thinking these are legitimate health clinics where they will receive medical care and a complete understanding of their choices.

CON: These centers use no public funds. Most are faith-based and if we don't tell folks what to say in church, we shouldn't be telling people what they can say in these centers. The bill will end up consuming valuable state resources and infringe important liberties guaranteed by the state and federal constitutions. It will have a significant negative impact on the enforcement of state consumer protection statutes. This bill will reduce women's choices because they will have nowhere to go to get support for bringing new life into the world. These centers offer help with things like diapers and newborn clothes. Women should know before they choose an abortion that it will cause both physical and psychological suffering. Some of these clinics do provide medical care, and in these cases the care is provided by licensed medical professionals. This bill will harm the women it purports to protect.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Tom, prime sponsor; Glynnis Kirchmeier, Erin Ward, student; Dr. Kate McLean, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists; Alyssa Piraino, Jessica Gabbry, citizens; Sophia Aragon, WA State Nurses Association.

CON: Senator Zarelli; Senator Becker; David DeWolf, Life Services; Maggie Kennedy, Caring Pregnancy Center; Celeste Auy, Care Center; Sherrie Turner, Whatcom County Pregnancy Clinic; Paula Cullen, Life Services/ Heartbeat; Kim Anderson, citizen.