

To: Senate Committee on Health Care, Human Services, and Rural Health Policy
From: Laura Terrill Patten, Executive Director, Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon
Date: April 1, 2013
Re: Testimony on SB 490

Chair Monnes Anderson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Laura Terrill Patten and I am the Executive Director of Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 490. This bill addresses critical patient safety concerns that occur as a result of the way that many Crisis Pregnancy Centers operate. I am here today asking the committee to create minimum disclosure and transparency expectations for Crisis Pregnancy Centers operating in Oregon.

In 2007, the Crisis Pregnancy Center Review Act was introduced with the hope of learning more about the information and services provided by Crisis Pregnancy Centers in our state. If passed, the Department of Human Services would have been charged with collecting data from Crisis Pregnancy Centers on the accuracy of medical information provided, advertising methods used, and the types of services provided. Unfortunately the bill did not pass and the study was never conducted.

Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon continued to hear stories from young women who had bad experiences with Crisis Pregnancy Centers, so we conducted our own research starting in April 2010. We have one of our longtime supporters with us today, Kate Rough, who will speak about her experiences visiting these centers. We uncovered information that caused us grave concern, especially with regard to the deceptive practices used in advertising and the type of information provided once a woman entered the facility.

We were able to identify more than 45 Crisis Pregnancy Centers currently operating in Oregon. These facilities are mostly unregistered (with the Oregon Corporation Division) and have no restrictions with regard to how they operate. There is a wide range of services offered, but most are staffed by volunteers with the goal of convincing women with unintended pregnancies not to have an abortion.

But Crisis Pregnancy Centers present themselves as something different. Seeking to attract young and economically vulnerable women in crisis, many of these facilities disguise themselves as medical clinics. On the surface, it is often hard to tell the difference between a Crisis Pregnancy Center and an actual medical facility.

These centers create the appearance of a medical office with their advertising and signage and by using waiting rooms, intake forms and white lab coats. But Crisis Pregnancy Centers are not medical facilities and they are not required to adhere to medical privacy laws established to protect patient privacy and confidentiality of records. Women entering CPCs are often unknowingly giving up their medical privacy rights because they believe they are in a legitimate medical clinic where their information will be kept confidential as required by HIPAA.

Deceptive signs and center names mislead women facing unintended pregnancies into thinking they will receive comprehensive services and accurate medical information. Despite claims of providing “all options,” these centers do not provide comprehensive information, as they refuse to give referrals for or access to abortion or contraception, focusing only on adoption and abstinence and making unsubstantiated claims that abortion leads to breast cancer and infertility. We were deeply concerned to learn that the majority of the centers we visited provided medically inaccurate information designed to discourage use of birth control pills and condoms, which has a potentially negative impact on public health and can have life threatening consequences.

SB 490 addresses concerns about lack of transparency at facilities that provide pregnancy tests and sonograms to be transparent about what services they do and do not provide. The bill mandates clarity in advertising and in easily visible signs on the premises whether the facility provides comprehensive birth control services, access to a licensed medical provider, and referral or access to abortion and prenatal medical care.

Our concern about privacy is addressed through a requirement in the bill that client records and medical information must be kept confidential unless written consent of the consumer has been granted. SB 490 also requires Crisis Pregnancy Centers to make client records, including written results for any tests or imaging, available to the client at no cost.

The bill exempts doctor’s offices and bona fide medical clinics that currently have much stricter guidelines governing their practices through state legislation and their board of licensure.

SB 490 establishes a complaint process through the Oregon Health Authority, which has oversight and is charged with investigating complaints. The bill creates penalties for those facilities who do not comply, with a fine structure that begins with a written warning and graduates up to maximum of \$10,000 for violations that are not resolved over time. We believe this bill has a neutral impact on the budget because the fines go to the Oregon Health Authority and fund the investigative and administrative work.

SB 490 has widespread support throughout the state. We have collected petition signatures from more than 13,000 Oregonians who want Crisis Pregnancy Centers to stop jeopardizing women’s health – and these voices are coming from everywhere from Vernonia to Pendleton, from Aumsville to La Pine and from Wolf Creek to Brookings.

I urge this committee to address these patient safety concerns and establish minimum consumer protection standards for Crisis Pregnancy Centers in Oregon. Thank you.