



## **Crisis Pregnancy Centers Revealed, Part II: *An Investigative Update on Virginia Crisis Pregnancy Centers***

### **Executive Summary**

NARAL Pro-Choice Virginia Foundation (NPCVF) engaged in a year-long investigation of crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs) throughout the Commonwealth from June of 2012 through June of 2013. This investigation served as a follow-up to NPCVF's 2009 CPC investigation and report,<sup>1</sup> which gave Virginians an unprecedented look into the misleading and potentially dangerous practices employed by CPCs in the Commonwealth.

The following report presents NPCVF's recent findings, collected over the past 12 months, to provide additional insight into the potential harm CPCs pose to women and Virginia communities, and present evidence for the need to inform women of the limitations of their services. Because of the inaccurate reproductive-health information many CPCs continue to provide, NARAL Pro-Choice Virginia believes, as in 2010, that these centers pose a significant threat to public health.

### **About Crisis Pregnancy Centers in Virginia**

Anyone seeking health-care services should receive comprehensive, unbiased, and medically accurate information. Women facing unintended pregnancy deserve no less.

Unable to shut down legitimate public-health centers, the anti-choice movement built a national network of nonprofit organizations posing as comprehensive health care clinics – 'crisis pregnancy centers' or 'limited service pregnancy centers.'

NPCVF identified 58 CPCs in Virginia, including two mobile units.<sup>2</sup> These CPCs do not provide or refer for abortion care or birth control. In addition, research conducted by NARAL Pro-Choice Virginia Foundation shows that the vast majority of CPCs in the Commonwealth spread medical falsehoods that put the health of women and all Virginians at risk. Furthermore, CPCs are often not regulated in the same way as comprehensive reproductive health clinics to ensure confidentiality of clients' personal and private information.

### **Investigation Findings**

The investigation, conducted by NARAL Pro-Choice Virginia Foundation staff and volunteers, included 77 phone calls and 10 in-person visits to 56 of the 58 CPCs in the Commonwealth. The

---

<sup>1</sup> "Crisis Pregnancy Centers Revealed: Virginia Crisis Pregnancy Center Investigations and Policy Proposals", January 20, 2010, <http://www.naralva.org/assets/bin/pdfs/cpcsrevealed.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> NPCVF discovered the presence of 2 CPC mobile units in May of 2013. Due to the limited timeframe of our project and report, we were unable to investigate these CPCs before the release deadline.

study's findings demonstrate that the vast majority of Virginia CPCs continue to relay medically inaccurate information to potential and current clientele about infertility, fetal development, sexually transmitted infections, contraception, pregnancy, and abortion. Of the 56 centers identified and investigated in Virginia, 71 percent (40) shared some degree of medically erroneous information.

#### Investigation Findings of Misleading and Medically Inaccurate Information:

- **40** CPCs shared medically erroneous information that abortion causes long-term psychological damage, including suggesting that women who have abortions can “get eating disorders, become alcoholic, or become drug addicts,”<sup>3</sup> and that “the sound of a vacuum would always bring back flashbacks of the abortion.”<sup>4</sup>
- **18** CPCs shared medically inaccurate information that abortion causes breast cancer, including several that issued the following warning on their respective websites: “A number of reliable studies have demonstrated a connection between abortion and later development of breast cancer.”<sup>5,6,7</sup>
- **25** CPCs falsely reported a link between abortion, infertility, and later pregnancy complications. One in-person investigator reported: “The counselor said that if I was a certain blood type, an abortion could cause my body to create antibodies that would attack my baby the next time I got pregnant.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Mandatory Ultrasound Law and Virginia CPCs**

In addition to updating our knowledge of CPCs' deceptive practices, NARAL Pro-Choice Virginia Foundation has explored the little-known intersection between Virginia's crisis pregnancy centers and the Commonwealth's newly enacted forced ultrasound law and 24-hour waiting period.

NPCVF has found clear evidence to suggest that, by codifying barriers to comprehensive reproductive health care, mandating state-sponsored advertising for illegitimate health centers, and perpetuating delays for women seeking abortion care, Virginia's newly enacted mandatory ultrasound law and 24-hour waiting period have served to support, aid, and legitimize Virginia's crisis pregnancy centers. NPCVF's 12-month investigation reveals that through this recently enacted legislation, the Virginia government is strategically attempting to dissuade Virginia women from accessing their full range of reproductive health care options, including abortion.

---

<sup>3</sup> “Northampton Pregnancy Center”. Belle Haven. Telephone Investigation. 28 Jan. 2013.

<sup>4</sup> “Shenandoah County Pregnancy Center”. Edinburg. Telephone Investigation. 30 Jan. 2013.

<sup>5</sup> “East End Pregnancy Test & Help Center”. Website Investigation. 20 Feb. 2013.

<http://eastendpreg.org/index.php/2012-11-21-14-50-02/abortion-education>

<sup>6</sup> “The Pregnancy Centers of Central Virginia.” Website Investigation. 20 Feb. 2013.

<http://virginiapregnancy.org/abortion/>

<sup>7</sup> “Abba Care”. Website Investigation. 20 Feb. 2013. <http://www.abbacare.org/abortion-education.html>

<sup>8</sup> “Harrisonburg Pregnancy Center.” Telephone Investigation. 30 Jan. 2013.

## **Policy Recommendations: Protecting Community Health and Privacy**

Based on the deeply troubling evidence gathered through NPCV's investigative update, we have put together two comprehensive policy recommendations to better protect the public health and privacy of Virginian women and their communities.

First, all crisis pregnancy centers must commit to a pre-certification by the Department of Health, confirming to provide only medically accurate information to their clientele as evidenced by a commitment to following the Department of Health's current standard of care and (1) supported by research conducted in compliance with accepted scientific methods; (2) recognized as accurate and objective by leading professional organizations and agencies with relevant expertise; and (3) published in scientifically proven peer-reviewed journals, if appropriate.

Additionally, NPCVF strongly recommends that the Virginia Department of Health not refer women to crisis pregnancy centers in the Commonwealth. VDH should require all organizations on its referral lists to promote the public health and meet a set of commonsense eligibility requirements.

NARAL Pro-Choice Virginia is dedicated to ensuring that all Virginians have complete and medically accurate information when faced with reproductive health decisions. Our policy proposal will help guarantee that crisis pregnancy centers throughout the Commonwealth maintain an honest and medically accurate standard of care, and better support public health.