

Crisis Pregnancy Centers Revealed

Virginia Crisis Pregnancy Center Investigations
and Policy Proposals

January 20, 2010

A Report by NARAL Pro-Choice Virginia Foundation

Dedication

NARAL Pro-Choice Virginia Foundation recognizes the brave providers of comprehensive reproductive health care in the Commonwealth.

Acknowledgements:

The year-long investigation and publication of this report could not have been possible without the guidance, encouragement, and enthusiasm from many members of the NARAL Pro-Choice Virginia Family. While this project began as a vision, it was made a reality because of the help of others providing legal guidance, volunteer hours, research, support and dedication.

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To our NARAL Pro-Choice Virginia Family, your patience, energy, and enthusiasm for our CPC efforts were unparalleled and we cannot thank you enough.

Yes Virginia. We Are Pro-Choice!

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Executive Summary

NARAL Pro-Choice Virginia Foundation (NPCVF) engaged in an investigation of crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs) throughout the Commonwealth from February through December of 2009. The following report provides insight into the potential harm these facilities pose to women and Virginia communities, evidence for the need to inform women of the limitations of their services, and policy recommendations regarding CPCs in the Commonwealth receiving funds through the “Choose Life” license plates. Because of the inaccurate reproductive-health information many CPCs provide, NARAL Pro-Choice Virginia believes these centers to be a threat to public health.

About Crisis Pregnancy Centers in Virginia

Anyone seeking health-care services should receive comprehensive, unbiased, medically and factually 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 generally unlicensed, unregulated organizations posing as comprehensive health care clinics – ‘crisis pregnancy centers’ or ‘limited service pregnancy centers.’

NPCVF identified 52 CPCs in Virginia, the vast majority of which are not medically-licensed facilities. At least 38 of these centers do not have any medically trained or medically supervised personnel on staff. These CPCs do not provide or refer for abortion care or birth control. In addition, research conducted by NARAL Pro-Choice Virginia Foundation found that most CPCs in the Commonwealth spread medical falsehoods that put the health of women and all Virginians at risk. Even in the case of centers that are overseen by medical professionals, there are no regulations in place to ensure that clients will receive medically-accurate information and services with respect to all reproductive-health options. There are also no regulations in place to ensure confidentiality of clients’ personal and private information.

Investigation Findings

The investigation, conducted by NARAL Pro-Choice Virginia Foundation staff and volunteers, included 28 in-person visits and 51 phone calls to all 52 CPCs in the Commonwealth. It is one of the largest investigations of its kind in the nation. The study’s findings demonstrate that most Virginia CPCs relay medically inaccurate information to potential and current clientele about infertility, fetal development, sexually transmitted infections, contraception, pregnancy, and abortion. Of the 52 centers identified and investigated in Virginia, 67 percent (35) shared some degree of medically erroneous information.

Investigation Findings of Evasive and Medically Inaccurate Information:

- Phone conversations were evasive as CPC staff frequently insisted, “If you want to come in and make an appointment, I can give you some more information,”¹ and “I can’t answer that over the phone. The nurse can talk to you about that here [in-person],”² rather than sharing the limits of their services.
- Fourteen CPCs shared medically erroneous information about sexually transmitted infections and 18 provided medically inaccurate information about contraception. For example, volunteers were told, “All condoms have flaws or holes...Using a condom does not protect you from AIDS or pregnancy.”³
- 17 CPCs shared medically erroneous information that abortion causes breast cancer. Many investigators were told the “Risk of breast cancer almost doubles after one abortion and rises even further with two or more abortions.”⁴
- 24 CPCs shared medically erroneous information that abortion causes long-term psychological damage, suggesting, “Women will commit suicide post-abortions,”⁵ and “Most women suffer Post Abortion Stress Disorder, which is the same as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, after having an abortion.”⁶

State-Sponsored Funding for CPCs

In April of 2009, Governor Kaine signed the ‘Choose Life’ license plate legislation, creating a funding stream for select CPCs in the Commonwealth. In order to be eligible to receive these funds, CPCs must sign Heartbeat International’s ‘Commitment of Care’ Standards. These standards include:

1. *Clients receive accurate information about pregnancy, fetal development, lifestyle issues, and related concerns.*
2. *We do not offer, recommend or refer for abortions or abortifacients, but are committed to offering accurate information about abortion procedures and risks.*
3. *All of our advertising and communication are truthful and honest and accurately describe the services we offer.*
4. *Client information is held in strict and absolute confidence.*

At the time of publication, \$9,360 had been funneled through the Commonwealth’s Department of Motor Vehicles to 38 different crisis pregnancy centers in the state. Of the 38 receiving these funds, 72 percent (26 CPCs) shared medically inaccurate information with clients, which is a

¹ “Bethany Christian Services.” Telephone Investigation. 24 August 2009.

² “Comfort Care. Waynesboro.” Telephone Investigation. 9 Dec. 2009.

³ “Condoms. Do They Really Work?” Heritage House ’76, Inc. 1998. Heritage House. Received from Assist CPC. In-Person Investigation. 14 May 2009.

⁴ *Abortion: Procedures, Risks, Side Effects*. Received from 1st Choice Women’s Health/Life Line. In-Person Investigation. 5 Nov. 2009.

⁵ “Front Royal Pregnancy Center.” In-Person Investigation. 30 June 2009.

⁶ “SLM Pregnancy Help Center.” In-Person Investigation. 24 June 2009.

violation of their own 'Commitment of Care' standards.⁷ NPCVF believes that if state-sanctioned money is to be allocated to these centers, they must commit to a standard of medical accuracy and honesty.

Policy Proposal: Protecting Community Health and Privacy

With the support of legislators, medical professionals, educators, leaders of faith communities, and activists, NPCVF has introduced legislation for the 2010 General Assembly Session to require signage for those centers receiving funds from the 'Choose Life' license plates. Placed at the primary entrance of each facility, the signage would state that these centers do not provide or refer for abortions, or birth control, and that they are not required to enforce HIPAA confidentiality.

The legislation also requires the information they share to be deemed medically accurate as evidenced by a commitment to following the Department of Health's current standard of care for pregnancy, family planning, and sexually transmitted diseases, 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 peer-reviewed journals, if appropriate.

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.

⁷ NPCVF only determined 36 of the 38 CPCs listed by Heartbeat International to exist. Lady Care Inc. and The Mattingly Test Center could not be verified by any information provided. In light of these findings, NPCVF concluded the total number for investigative purposes and quantitative analysis to be 36.

