



Date: November 15, 2008  
Submitted by: Jean Bucaria,  
Deputy Director  
Contact: 212.627.9895

## **Testimony on Behalf of the National Organization for Women**

### **New York City Chapter (NOW-NYC)**

**On**

### **Limited Service Pregnancy Centers (Int. No. 371)**

The National Organization for Women-New York City is in full support of the proposed Limited Service Pregnancy Centers bill (Int. No. 371) for New York City which would require that limited service pregnancy centers, which NOW-NYC refers to as crisis pregnancy centers (CPC's), disclose in clearly posted signs on-site and on any web site or written advertisement that they do not provide abortion or FDA-approved contraceptive drugs or devices or referrals for abortion or contraceptives. The bill also requires that these centers make it clear if a licensed medical provider is not available, and it has measures built in to enforce compliance.

As a pro-choice women's rights organization, we speak on behalf of our members, representing thousands of women and men across the five boroughs of New York City, who agree that this bill is a necessary measure to ensure that women are able to obtain comprehensive reproductive healthcare without being deceived, misled, or given false information about their own health status or choices.

Crisis pregnancy centers intentionally mislead women by posing as medical providers, from which the public would have a reasonable expectation of receiving unbiased and factual health information. Instead, it's been demonstrated that these centers often provide inaccurate information, harming women by trying to prevent them from obtaining the information they need to make a well-informed decision on what's best for their health and their life.

How can we legally allow a facility to pose as a medical provider to women without any safeguards or disclosure requirements in place? In what other area of healthcare would we allow clinics that look like real medical facilities set up shop and give people information on their health without a license or provide information that is false? It sounds ridiculous. Yet this is exactly what's happening to women seeking reproductive healthcare, and it has to stop.

Here in New York City, there are more than a dozen crisis pregnancy centers. Most claim to offer services such as pregnancy testing and ultrasounds, but they are not actually licensed by the state of New York to provide any medical services. This is intentionally misleading. Their actual purpose is plain and simple: to dissuade women facing an unplanned pregnancy from having an abortion.

**Testimony on Behalf of the National Organization for Women  
New York City Chapter (NOW-NYC)  
Limited Service Pregnancy Centers (Int. No. 371)**

Most New Yorkers have become familiar with the series of subway ads for “Free Abortion Alternatives,” which provide the phone number for one of a chain of 10 Crisis Pregnancy Centers operating across the five boroughs—EMC Frontline Pregnancy Centers. While the main EMC Frontline Pregnancy Center web site—[www.emcfrontline.org](http://www.emcfrontline.org)—clearly states their anti-choice agenda by proclaiming that they are “on the frontlines for life....in The Abortion Capital of America” other crisis pregnancy center web sites, even different web sites for some of the EMC Frontline Centers appear more neutral. For example, many of the EMC Frontline Pregnancy Centers also advertise through innocuous sounding web sites like [findpregnancyhelp.com/NYC](http://findpregnancyhelp.com/NYC) or [www.abortion-options.com](http://www.abortion-options.com) that contain misleading and false information. In fact, [abortion-options.com](http://abortion-options.com), which posts the locations and phone numbers of EMC Frontline Pregnancy Center locations, lists among its services: “Free pregnancy tests, Free sonograms, STD testing, Gynecology, and Family Planning.” It also states “Most insurance/HMOs Accepted” and claims to host “Board-Certified Physicians.” This is followed by the statement, “Alternatives and Options offers free pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, and material help to those facing a crisis pregnancy or thinking of abortion as an alternative through 10 help centers located throughout the greater New York City area.” Does this sound like a facility that may not have a licensed physician on site or a place that would not even provide a referral to an abortion provider? Investigations into crisis pregnancy centers both locally and nationwide have shown that a licensed physician is often not found on site. Furthermore, none of these centers in New York City offer birth control (other than the recommendation of abstinence) and they will not even refer a woman to places that do.

What the ads and web sites for these centers have in common is their advertising approach in listing a range of services, such as “FREE Confidential Options Counseling” and “FREE pregnancy tests.” By listing out services and health insurance availability the crisis pregnancy centers aim to convey medical authority and the idea that they provide a range of options to potential clients, when this could not be further from the truth.

Perhaps the clearest evidence that these centers intentionally aim to be misleading is their physical location—they are always located within walking distance of an abortion provider—sometimes even in the same building (see attached exhibit). To a young woman riding the train home, doing a frantic web search, looking in the yellow pages, or even walking by, it’s easy to see how these centers could be confused with a legitimate woman’s health clinic—one that would offer a full range of medical services and scientifically-backed information and referrals.

What women are getting instead is a slew of misinformation that remains unsupported by any authority or major organization in the medical establishment. As NARAL Pro-Choice New York detailed in its recent report that investigated 16 crisis pregnancy centers across the city, women that seek information from crisis pregnancy centers are often wrongly told that abortion causes a higher risk of breast cancer or that they will become infertile, and the procedure is inaccurately portrayed as extremely dangerous. In reality, abortion is one of the most common medical procedures performed in the U.S. and there isn’t one mainstream medical authority that supports these claims.

**Testimony on Behalf of the National Organization for Women  
New York City Chapter (NOW-NYC)  
Limited Service Pregnancy Centers (Int. No. 371)**

A NOW-NYC volunteer who works as a counselor for a local abortion provider in New York City said that this is all very familiar to her. She noted that pregnant teens are especially vulnerable to the manipulations of crisis pregnancy centers, often going there first to get help without realizing that they are not going to get unbiased and medically accurate information and guidance. She said that for these young women who are seeking an abortion, a mistaken visit to a crisis pregnancy center fills them with unnecessary fear and confusion. She's heard numerous clients say, "They told me that I'll never be able to have a baby. Is that true?" As this counselor puts it, "These young women need a medically sound perspective to inform them about what all their actual options are," and "At the end of the day the power should be in the hand of the woman."

These findings also corroborate what a 2006 congressional report requested by Representative Henry Waxman found—that 87% of crisis pregnancy centers receiving federal funding provide false information. Although none of the New York City centers receive federal or state funds at this time, it's clear that they are misrepresenting themselves as unbiased, medical authorities and as a result are preventing women from getting comprehensive and accurate information so that they can make an informed choice that works best for them. It's clear that New York City needs to act.

Baltimore, Maryland and Austin, Texas have already passed similar disclosure laws. Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney from New York and Senator Robert Menendez of New Jersey are already working to tackle this problem on a national level, recently reintroducing the Stop Deceptive Advertising Women's Services Act which would enable the Federal Trade Commission to penalize organizations that mislead women.

If we care about women, then it is our charge and that of our city and community to protect and ensure women's access to comprehensive and unbiased medical care. If we do not pass this bill, we are failing the women of this city and blocking their right to have clear access to legal abortion and to medically and scientifically accurate information about their own selves and bodies. Thank you.

*About NOW-NYC:* The National Organization for Women is the nation's largest organization working to advance women's rights and improve women's lives. The New York City Chapter of NOW, founded in 1966, is the largest chapter in the country with 5,000 members locally and 35,000 statewide. NOW-NYC works to promote women's reproductive rights, secure women's economic empowerment, and end violence and discrimination against women.