

Alliance for Life Michigan



Jim Sprague, Board President, Alliance for Life-Michigan
Testimony before the House Judiciary Committee regarding HB 5158
September 9, 2009

Chairman Meadows, members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Jim Sprague and, I am here this morning in my role as Board President for the Alliance for Life—Michigan. However, I am also Executive Director of the Pregnancy Resource Center in Grand Rapids, which is one of the largest pregnancy centers in the nation.

In my role at the PRC in Grand Rapids, we have seen more than 7,800 client service opportunities in 2008 alone. In my role with the Alliance for Life, I represent the 100 pregnancy care centers throughout the Great Lake State, where we estimate that the total number of client service opportunities from all centers to be around 74,000 annually.

I come to you today in strong opposition to HB 5158. For those involved in the important work of serving women and their families in the pregnancy centers throughout Michigan, the bill raises four major concerns.

1. This bill violates the rights protected by our Constitution's first amendment, infringing on the freedom of religion. One of the primary tenants of HB 5158 requires staff and volunteers of pregnancy centers to not only refer for but also provide a geographical listing of abortion providers.

Because Pregnancy Centers are faith-based organizations, the sanctity of human life is central to the assistance we provide the clients who turn to us for information, education and services. For state law to now require faith-based organizations to make abortion referrals sharply contradicts the very Judeo-Christian principles upon which these organizations are founded, funded, and operate.

2. The bill requires a notice be posted at all pregnancy centers stating, *“None of our services are provided by licensed medical professionals.”* This is simply not true, as many centers do in fact provide medical services by medically trained professionals. For example, the PRC in Grand Rapids uses only Board Certified sonographers, employs two Registered Nurses, and the protocols for our medical operation are written and supervised by an area OB/GYN.

To provide support to all centers in the state, The Alliance for Life—Michigan is hosting a conference next month to call all the centers in the state to a uniform standard of care and practice.

3. The bill contradicts itself by requiring center personnel to inform their clients that they do not provide abortion referrals, while at the same time requiring them to offer a detailed list of such providers. This scenario creates what appears to be a no-win situation, where a center will be in violation of the law no matter how they attempt to comply.
4. The bill is inaccurately labeled. It refers to the work done in “crisis pregnancy centers.” The fact is that not all clients of the pregnancy centers are in crisis. These organizations meet a wide range of human service needs, such as (1) counseling women who are pregnant or whom are dealing with the emotional issues related to having had an abortion, (2) providing material support for women caring for infants, to (3) educating young people of the risks involved with sexual activity, including but not limited to pregnancy.

Further evidence of the support we have for the wide range of services we offer can be found in referrals we receive from county health departments themselves. For example, two years ago the Pregnancy Resource Center of Grand Rapids was contacted by the Kent County Health Department when they discontinued their pregnancy testing services. After a tour of our operation and a lengthy meeting with our staff, they were pleased to know their referrals for services no longer offered by the county would be well served in our professional organization. This type of community partnership continues to this day and typifies what goes on in regions all across Michigan.

If HB 5158 were enacted into law, it would hamper the work of 100 pregnancy centers throughout our state, putting tens of thousands of clients

served by these organizations in a situation where they will no longer have access to our resources, and would be more dependent upon shrinking services offered by the State. Therefore, we respectfully ask that you vote no on House Bill 5158.

I want to again thank the committee for allowing me this opportunity to explain our opposition to this bill. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.