

Elizabeth Hopkins
House Bill 297
Opponent Testimony
Ohio House Ways and Means Committee
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Chairman Merrin, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Rogers, and Members of the Ohio House Ways and Means Committee, my name is Elizabeth Hopkins. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present testimony in opposition to House Bill 297.

I was 21 when I found out that I was pregnant from a guy that I had recently met. We were both in recovery and attempting to do better with our lives, I was on birth control at the time because I knew that bringing a child into this world at that time was not the right choice for me. When my monthly cycle was late I began to worry that the contraception had failed somehow and went to what I thought was a legitimate clinic to get a pregnancy test.

This clinic was centrally located in a busy part of the city where University of Cincinnati students live. There were signs out front that stated "Free Pregnancy Tests" and that it was a "Pregnancy Care Center" so I was under the impression that this place must've been a Health Clinic that specialized in reproductive healthcare.

The building itself was in an old mansion that had been repurposed in Clifton, the University district of Cincinnati. Upon entering the building I was shown to a waiting room where I saw multiple magazines and books with religious themes, a glass partition that separated the reception area and the receptionist from the waiting room, and chairs for customers to sit. The receptionist greeted me and handed me paperwork that had questions about insurance and other general health background information that reinforced this idea that the Pregnancy Care Center was a professionally staffed health care facility. The waiting room really seemed to be like any other waiting room in a health care facility that I had been in.

I was taken back to a small room where I went through a screening process. Questions about my background, sexual activity and relationships were asked. This process reminded me of other places I had been for my reproductive healthcare and I didn't find that it was out of the ordinary given I was coming to get a pregnancy test, something I thought was being administered by a health care professional. There was an elderly woman who asked me the questions and then handed me an over-the-counter pregnancy test and told me to go urinate in a cup, bring it out and wait. After I used the restroom the elderly woman came back into the "exam" room and took a few drops of my urine and administered the OTC pregnancy test in my presence. I remember thinking that it was strange she was using this kind of test, one that I could've gotten from the dollar store or somewhere else.

When the test came back positive I was shocked and frustrated. As I mentioned, I was not in the position to have a child and had taken the appropriate measures to make sure that did not happen. She immediately calculated my due date and began to write things in the chart they

had started on me. There was no discussion of options, just congratulations and the assumption that I would follow through with the only option that was presented to me, keeping this pregnancy to term because “it must’ve been divine order”. Being raised in a southern Baptist household, I knew what those words meant. They are frequently used when something surprising happens as a means to show that God is responsible for whatever the occurrence is. She spoke to me about the “child’s father” and what he was like. She seemed to imply, by her manner, that I would need to let him know I was pregnant and we would need to work together to see this pregnancy to term.

The woman told me of all the different programs they had available to help women like me. She mentioned that they had programs for couples as well. The entire experience was very focused on assuming I was planning to keep this pregnancy. She got me the WIC paperwork and told me where I could sign up for Medicaid since I was pregnant now and under the poverty line. She then sent me back to see a “nutritionist” who told me what I should eat in order to have a healthy pregnancy and baby. Looking back, I’m not sure if this person was a trained nutritionist or what sort of background they had that enabled them to give out medical advice. The women at the CPC continued to try to get me to enlist in some of their programs by preying on my current circumstances of poverty and youth. They asked me if I could afford the crib, clothing, etc. and told me that I could “get free baby items” if I came to the CPC once every two weeks for parenting classes. They pressed this issue of me signing up to come back for various “classes” multiple times and later called me to see if I was interested or had changed my mind. I left that building feeling as if I had been coerced into keeping the pregnancy and that if I didn’t I was somehow letting “God down”.

Two weeks passed and I began to experience some spotting. I tried to look for a different place to go get checked out but I ended up going back to the crisis pregnancy center as a last resort. When I told them I was experiencing light spotting they made sure to get in to the CPC as soon as possible. When I arrived I was taken back to the “exam room”, asked a bunch of questions about my recent activities, if anything had changed and then the same woman who had originally given me the pregnancy test used an Over-the-Counter Doppler to scan my uterus and ensure the fetus’s heartbeat. Again, I was led to believe that this was a medically trained professional who was using medical instruments to examine me. Once the heartbeat was found I was told that everything was fine and spoken to about my diet again. Looking back, I realize that I was young and had no real knowledge of what was happening inside this Center and was never told whether or not these people had the proper training to give me medical information. They never mentioned going to the hospital if the bleeding continued, they simply told me to take it easy.

A few weeks later, I chose to terminate that pregnancy. I had been going over this choice from the moment I believed I was pregnant but something inside me felt extreme guilt and condemnation when I was at the CPC thinking through my options. It’s taken me a while to be able to own this story and say that I have finally come to terms with my decision to terminate the pregnancy and genuinely believe that it was the best choice for my life at that time. Though the CPC was set up as a caring facility that put itself in juxtaposition to other professional

reproductive services, I believe my experience shows how easy it is to manipulate a young, unassuming person into making a decision that is not in line with their needs/desires.

Once I had truly decided to terminate my pregnancy I sought out the services of Planned Parenthood, a place that I had been going to for my birth control for the last 5 years. I knew that they offered the services I was seeking and I knew from experience that they would take excellent care of me. During my time at PP I was offered comprehensive care regarding my surgical procedure, counselling about what my options were, and clear, unbiased support for the decision that I ultimately made to end the pregnancy. I wish it was more widely publicized that Planned Parenthood also offered free pregnancy tests so that thousands of other young women could save themselves from the deceptive experience of a CPC. I know that had I went to PP from the onset of this pregnancy I would've been offered all my options and the complimentary education with each choice presented.

My experience at the CPC was confusing at best and intentionally misleading. It led me to feel shame for not wanting to carry the pregnancy to term with it's overtly extremist Christian rhetoric and it also preyed on my youthful ignorance.

This is why I am asking you to vote No on HB 297. The state of Ohio should not be in the business of giving special treatment to these very bias centers whose purpose is to deceive pregnant people. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

I will now take any questions you may have.