

Crisis Pregnancy Centers: Real Experiences

Florida women often describe being harassed, bullied, and given blatantly false information at Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs). Many assert that their confidentiality has been violated, and that mistreatment by CPCs has threatened their health. Here are three of their stories:

Janessa from the Tampa Bay Area had been so ill due to her high-risk twin pregnancy that she was hospitalized and put on bed rest. She was unable to work and already struggling to make ends meet, and with her health suffering, she decided that an abortion was her best option, and made an appointment with a provider in her city. Hoping to save money on the ultrasound she needed before her appointment, Janessa went to a nearby clinic that advertised free ultrasound services. Unfortunately, the clinic was an anti-choice crisis pregnancy center (CPC), and instead of providing Janessa with a reliable ultrasound, **they shamed her for her decision** to have an abortion. Staff repeatedly forced her to view the ultrasound images of her “baby boys,” and **told her they would call her after she left to discuss her pregnancy, despite her distress.** Janessa was sure of her choice to obtain abortion care and continued to gather the funds she needed to afford her procedure, but she confided in her counselor that she was shaken by her experience at the CPC, intimidated by their threats to contact her repeatedly despite her wishes. Fortunately, Janessa’s counselors and health care providers gave her the support and resources she needed, and she was able to obtain her abortion care.

Christine, a single mother in Jacksonville, found out she was pregnant after she got a free pregnancy test from a local clinic. After thoughtful consideration, she decided that an abortion was the right choice for her, and went back to the clinic—a CPC—for a free ultrasound. **CPC staff falsely told Christine that she would have to wait for another two weeks** before she could have an ultrasound; then, they talked to her about religion, forced her to hold a doll that they claimed was “what a baby would look like at six weeks,” and **lied to her about her fetus’ development**, saying that her baby already had a brain and would feel pain during an abortion procedure. Although she was scared by her encounter at the CPC, Christine was still confident in her decision to have an abortion. With help from the NAF Hotline Fund, she was able to contact a legitimate medical facility and obtain the care she needed.

Katherine from the Florida panhandle was unemployed, and her husband had just been laid off, when she found out that she was pregnant. Katherine knew that having an abortion was the best option for their family at that time. She scheduled an appointment at the nearest clinic that could provide her care—over 250 miles away from her home—and worked to come up with the funds she would need to travel there and pay for her procedure. On the day of her appointment Katherine drove hours to her provider, only to be **lured into a CPC next door to the clinic, with a similar name** and staff who assured her she was in the right place. They told her that they did not see her name in their system, and tried to get her to fill out extensive paperwork. Fortunately, before Katherine supplied any of her personal information or details about her medical history, she asked if they provided abortion care, and when they admitted that they did not—and **had misled her about where she was**—Katherine left the CPC and made it to the medical facility next door in time for her appointment.



Targeted advertising used by CPCs to lure in scared, confused and vulnerable women.

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Annie's Story

In March of 2014, I was 16 years old and scared. There was a chance I could've been pregnant. Due to lack of sex education throughout my years in public school and fear of asking my mom about the birds and the bees, I was scared, confused and didn't know where to go.

Every day on my way to school I passed a "Community Pregnancy Clinic." All that I knew about this clinic was that they advertised on the side of their building, "FREE PREGNANCY TESTING." It took me a few days to muster up the courage to pop in for a pregnancy test. **I was scared and confused and thought this was a health facility that could help me, so I went.**

When we walked in, we assumed the women at the front desk, who were friendly at first, were nurses. They asked why I was there and responded in an almost sympathetic manner when I told them why.

The room they took me into looked nothing like any doctor's office I have ever been in before. It looked more like a therapist's office. There was one big couch, a love seat, a tissue box and a bible. This was the first sign of any religion I had seen. A woman came in and asked me questions like: "If you are pregnant, do you know who the father is?" She asked me his first and last name, she asked, "What's the extent of your relationship?" She said, "You aren't supposed to have sex until marriage, but if you do, you should be in love and in a committed relationship, right?" **She made me feel guilty.**

The woman came back and said she had the test results. Like anyone in this position would be, I was incredibly anxious. Before telling me the test results she asked what my religious affiliation was. I told her I was raised Catholic but I wouldn't identify with any religion at this point. She gave me a pamphlet about religion. I reminded her why I was there and asked what the result of the test was. It was negative.

This woman then began to give me a lesson on abstinence and how I still can be 'saved' despite the 'mistakes' I have made. She gave me all sorts of pamphlets: abstinence, Christianity, adoption, horror of abortion. She went on to explain the only form of birth control is abstinence and that all other forms can cause cancer and/or kill you. **At the end of it all she reminded me that she had all of my info and would be notifying my family of my visit.**

I oppose HB 41 because of my concern for young people like myself. **I hope that no one else has to go through the judgmental and shaming experience like I did.** When faced with the possibility of an unintended pregnancy, women deserve unbiased, medically accurate information about all of their options, not to be judged, shamed and threatened.