

Prohibition of Safety Regulations for Pregnancy Resource Centers: Revoking Local Control

[SB 41](#) - [Sen. Wallingford](#) (R-27, Cape Girardeau)

[HB 174](#) - [Rep. Hubrecht](#) (R-151, Dexter)

These bills would take away the rights of local governments to regulate so-called Pregnancy Resource Centers (PRCs). These centers would not have to adhere to existing ordinances with which other entities must comply. PRCs would not be required to comply with rules or ordinances established in the future, such as requirements regarding client confidentiality or false and misleading advertising. PRCs are on record for providing false and misleading information to women, men and young people about pregnancy and sex. Currently, they are not required to provide medically factual or accurate information. PRCs are *not* regulated in the content of the “medical” advice or referrals they provide.

In contrast, abortion providers adhere to more than 30 laws and regulations, including many medically unnecessary restrictions. This bill would place PRCs beyond the reach of the law.

PRCs do not meet the standard of care for women’s health services.

Many PRCs falsely advertise themselves as health care facilities. These facilities are not licensed medical centers and do not meet the health care or privacy needs of the women they target, yet they receive taxpayer funding. While women may get a free drug-store pregnancy test and, in some cases, an ultrasound (which is not interpreted by a medical professional), they do not receive physical exams, sexually transmitted infection (STI) treatment, birth control counseling, or prenatal care coordination.

The information PRCs provide is unregulated, biased, and often times false.

Staff at most religiously-based facilities offer women medically inaccurate or incomplete information and often use intimidation tactics to dissuade women from obtaining abortions. A woman should have accurate information about all of her options. Information should support her, help her make a decision for herself, and enable a woman to take care of her health and well-being.

PRCs put ideology before women’s health.

These facilities are run by anti-abortion organizations that deceptively market themselves as professional health facilities. The vast majority of staff at these organizations are not medical professionals and are not licensed to provide health care services in Missouri, and therefore are not required to comply with medical ethics or operate under Missouri’s informed consent or privacy laws. A woman’s health is often put at risk by staff who are opposed to all forms of contraception and focus on pushing an anti-abortion agenda instead of listening to the needs and concerns of the patient. PRCs do not offer referrals for the reproductive health care women need – even when referrals are specifically requested. This can mean a woman’s reproductive health care is delayed, risking her health and safety.

Just One Example of How Pregnancy Resource Centers Harm Women's Health and Should NOT Be Put Beyond the Reach of Regulation

Sarah* became my patient when she came to the emergency room with her mother, suffering from severe abdominal pain. She had a positive pregnancy test and was immediately evaluated by the gynecology team. An ultrasound quickly confirmed that she had an ectopic pregnancy that was bleeding into her abdomen. Given the emergent nature of her condition, we quickly brought her to surgery to remove the abnormal pregnancy and to stop the bleeding.

It wasn't until after the surgery that Sarah's mother told me about their visit to a PRC. They went to a center that offered free care and counseling for pregnant women after Sarah confided in her mother that she missed her period and a home pregnancy test was positive. Sarah and her mother discussed her pregnancy before the visit to the PRC and decided together that terminating the pregnancy, initiating contraception and returning to her life as a high-school student would be best for Sarah. However, they were ecstatic to find out at their visit that Sarah "wasn't" pregnant. Sarah's mother told me how the woman at the PRC performed an ultrasound and didn't see a pregnancy in Sarah's uterus. The woman told Sarah that she probably miscarried. Sarah and her mother inquired about birth control and were told that the "only acceptable option for a 16 year old is abstinence."

Sarah's mother told me that the center's response made her feel shame for asking about birth control for her daughter. However, she was overjoyed that Sarah would not have to make the decision to have an abortion. They left the center under the impression that the ordeal was over and that Sarah could return to being a teenager. Instead, Sarah's pregnancy continued to grow in her fallopian tube. Eventually, it ruptured and put her life at risk. Ultimately, Sarah underwent a surgery to remove the pregnancy and her fallopian tube. Had she received proper medical care earlier, the ectopic pregnancy would have been diagnosed and Sarah could have had a less invasive procedure, preserving her fallopian tube. Not only was Sarah unable to get appropriate medical care at the PRC but she received inaccurate information that negatively impacted her health and put her life at risk. The loss of her fallopian tube is a direct result of the inappropriate care and deceptive guidance given to Sarah by the PRC and will impact her ability to conceive a child in the future.

Excerpted from Testimony of Colleen McNicholas, DO, Leadership Training Academy Fellow, Physicians for Reproductive Health

**Please note that the patient's name has been changed to protect confidentiality.*