

New Bill Could Force Churches To Refer Women to Abortion Clinics

The Hawaii Senate approved a bill that will force all pregnancy centers to post signs with abortion referrals—even pro-life centers housed in churches.

“They want to mandate all pro-life centers to put an abortion referral sign in our reception areas,” said Derald Skinner, pastor at Calvary Chapel Pearl Harbor. “Now our particular pro-life center is in our church. So it’s very important to realize that they are dictating to us what we can and cannot say. Will they give me my sermon next and tell me what I can preach?”

The bill, State Bill 501, specifically reads:

Thousands of Hawaii women are in need of publicly-funded family planning services, contraception services and education, abortion services, prenatal care and birth-related services. In 2010, 16,000 Hawaii women experienced an unintended pregnancy, which can carry enormous social and economic costs to both individual families and to the state at large. Yet, many women in Hawaii remain unaware of the public programs available to provide them with contraception, health education and counseling, family planning, prenatal care, abortion and birth-related services.

Because family planning decisions are time-sensitive and care early in pregnancy is important, Hawaii must make every possible effort to advise women of all available reproductive health programs. In Hawaii, low-income women can receive immediate access to free or low-cost comprehensive family planning services and pregnancy-related care through Med-

QUEST and the department of health's family planning program. However, only providers who contract with these programs are able to immediately enroll patients in these programs at the time of a health center visit.

The bill affects all crisis pregnancy centers, many of which are housed in churches or function as a church ministry.

"These donation-based CPCs, who serve women selflessly with love and respect at no cost, would be forced to promote state-assisted abortion or pay exorbitant fines if they don't submit. What's more, these bills go against their religious freedoms that the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution clearly support," Concerned Women for America of Hawaii State Director Barbara J. Ferraro writes in an op-ed.

"If the pro-abortion crowd is truly 'pro-choice,' why not support pregnancy care centers that give women other options? One venue should not be forced to support the other. Women are more than capable of making their own choice," she said. {eo}