

Federal Alternatives to Abortion Program Introduced

[Harrisburg, PA - September 24, 1999] - Pennsylvania could become the model for a federally-funded alternatives-to-abortion program if legislation recently introduced by two Pennsylvania members of Congress becomes law. Congressman Joseph Pitts (R) and Senator Rick Santorum (R) introduced the Women and Children's Resources Act at the Capitol September 21.

The act would establish an \$85 million formula grant program to provide assistance, such as maternity home, pregnancy center, and adoption services, to women facing unplanned pregnancies. The program would be virtually identical to a Pennsylvania program, Project Women In Need (WIN), established during Governor Robert P. Casey's tenure.

"This is legislation that can frankly bring pro-life and pro-choice together to offer real solutions to women - on common ground," said Congressman Pitts. "If today's women need choices, we must offer them real choices. We must offer them compassion. This is the essence of caring for women."

Upon receipt of a grant, states would privately contract out the distribution of funds directly to crisis pregnancy centers, maternity homes, and adoption services on a fee-for-service basis. Low-income women will be given priority, but the grants will not be exclusively means-tested.

Program funding for the Women and Children's Resources Act would be exclusively available to entities offering alternatives to abortion. Organizations that promote, refer, or counsel for abortion could not receive funding.

Amy Stoner, director of 12 Project WIN sites for Catholic Social Services in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, said, "I wish every state had the option we have." According to Stoner, through Project WIN, women are learning about options they never knew they had. The most important thing to know about Project WIN, Stoner said, is that "Project WIN is about helping women and children. It is about responding to the young woman who called on our pregnancy hotline just last night, pregnant, homeless, with nowhere to turn and no one to help her." Stoner urged support for the Women and Children's Resource Act, saying, "Imagine the impact that a program like this could have in cities such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles."

"Government funding for abortion alternatives is the way to lower the number of abortions in the United States," said Kevin Bagatta, Esq., president and CEO of Real Alternatives, which administers Pennsylvania's Project WIN. "That's what the Women and Children's Resources Act is about, reducing abortions. We definitely support it!"

The Pennsylvania Catholic Conference, representing the bishops of Pennsylvania and 3.6 million Catholics, strongly supports the new legislation. "This act can help provide real choices for pregnant women in desperate situations by offering hope to them and their unborn babies," said PCC Executive Director Robert J. O'Hara, Jr.

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