



OPINION

Here's how state governments can help women choose alternatives to abortion

Real Alternatives is paving the way.

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By Kim Hayes

September 21, 2020 (Pregnancy Help News) — If you are providing life-saving services to families in need and are not getting taxpayer funding, why not?

Real Alternatives recently celebrated 25 years of serving 322,813 clients through 1,888,825 client visits in Pennsylvania. As the statewide administrator for Pennsylvania's Pregnancy and Parenting Support Program, Real Alternatives assisted those 300-thousand-plus

Pennsylvania residents via public funding.

Real Alternatives uses a network of 29 service providers with 86 pregnancy support centers, maternity homes and other pregnancy help sites in 33 counties, Heartbeat International affiliates among them, with 234 caring and compassionate trained counselors to provide free pregnancy support and parenting education services to women and families in Pennsylvania.

Kevin Bagatta is president and CEO of Real Alternatives, which has extended their operations into Indiana and Michigan. Thirteen other states have started taxpayer-funded operations with Real Alternatives' assistance.

“When explaining the program to government officials from other states,” Bagatta said, “I’ll often ask them, ‘Do you know what they call a positive approach to the most controversial issue of our time? They call it a solution!’”

Vice President Mike Pence has supported Real Alternatives starting in 2014 as governor of Indiana, directing the state’s Department of Health to contract with them to start and operate a \$1-million program modeled after Pennsylvania’s.

“For more than two decades, Real Alternatives has empowered women for life by providing positive, life-affirming pregnancy and parenting support services to women and families in need. I am grateful to all the men and women who have dedicated their time and talent through the Real Alternatives network,” Pence wrote in 2018 congratulating the organization.

In the Real Alternatives model (which could be duplicated in all 50 states) the state hires the organization to administer a statewide program that promotes childbirth rather than abortion. The PA group was the first Alternatives to Abortion Program to receive state and then federal funding. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is the federally funded portion.

“After the pregnancy, especially with young people, that unplanned pregnancy, or unexpected pregnancy can become a crisis parenting situation,” Bagatta said. “We’ll be there with them for that time to make sure they are ready and are providing good parenting and good nurturing and are being taken care of during that first year of life.”

Real Alternatives is the only statewide faith-based program funded in Pennsylvania. At \$7.263 million per year (\$6.263 million state and \$1 million TANF) taxpayers are empowering women to choose life and have the resources to thrive.

Real Alternatives’ goal is to provide life-affirming alternatives to abortion services throughout the nation. Therefore, Bagatta seeks to share the information with any pro-life organizations serving women and families in need.

Measurable outcomes of the program include the increase of women who choose life rather than abortion — among those served by Real Alternatives, 60% of abortion-minded clients and 89% abortion-pressured clients choose life.



As Real Alternatives' network of programs thrive, there are increases in measured outcomes of physical and emotional support, knowledge of adoption, parenting skills, reproductive health due to STD education, and the modification of risky lifestyle behavior through abstinence education.

The Pregnancy and Parenting Support Program gets results for taxpayers' investment, as health and Medicaid costs are lowered due to high rates of pre-natal and pediatric care, and immunization.

As Real Alternatives recently celebrated 25 years, national growth of their programs was highlighted at the organization's banquet.

For six years Real Alternatives partnered with Texas Pregnancy Care Network (TPCN). In 2012, TPCN assumed sole administration of their program.

Among the award winners at the 25th Anniversary celebration was Mike Turzai, the former speaker of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. He has been an avid supporter of Real Alternatives.

"Every single human being is beautiful. Everybody is capable and will contribute to this world," Turzai stated, addressing the Real Alternatives banquet. "And everybody wants to feel the love of their family, friends and another human being. You are not only providing that love, protection and care during the pregnancy, but you are doing it after the pregnancy."

Another award winner was former Governor of Pennsylvania, Mark Schweiker, who had increased funding of Real Alternatives with \$1 million of TANF funds. These funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for alternative to abortion services programs were the result of U.S. Senator Rick Santorum pushing for the approval of TANF for such

services.

Schweiker stated, “Real Alternatives steers women into the reassuring hand of service providers and away from fear and uncertainty.”

The Real Alternatives model demonstrates real potential for other states. Bagatta is eager to talk with any organization interested in knowing more.

“With the financial resources provided by taxpayers,” stated Bagatta, “the pregnancy support centers, Catholic Charities, maternity homes, and adoption agencies can hire more counselors and open more centers thereby compassionately serving more women in unexpected pregnancies and lower abortions!”

As **studies have demonstrated**, abortion-minded and abortion-vulnerable women need at least one person in their lives to empower them to choose life with confidence.

Bagatta points out this is the driving force of the Real Alternatives program.

“The real alternative to abortion is another person,” said Bagatta. “Connecting a woman with that one voice (counselor, pregnancy help center or other resource) is a dual empowering force for life. First for her own and for her baby.”

Accountability in billing for actual, specific services performed for women in need and the extensive tracking of funds is part of Real Alternatives' history and is a vital aspect of working with government funded programing.

All billed services occur as a one-on-one service to women in need.

Any savings in administrative costs, which Bagatta's team keeps as low as possible, are redirected toward advertising. This increases traffic to Real Alternatives' **website** where women utilize the zip code specific referral system to locate local services.

Bagatta eagerly looks forward to the overturn of Roe vs Wade decision, but noted, “Even when that happens, we will still need to continue this work to support women who need help.”

For now he looks forward to hearing from more states eager to utilize this opportunity for taxpayer funded pro-life programs, stating, “The vision is for the citizens of every state to see their taxpayer dollars to be used to help at risk women, empowering them so they do not need to choose abortion.”

Note from the editor of Pregnancy Help News: Heartbeat International manages Pregnancy Help News.

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