



SB 2129
alt to Abortion

Sunday, March 19, 2023

Distinguished Members of the Senate and House of Representatives,

Warm greetings from Grand Forks!

As the Executive Director of a pregnancy help organization which offers all services 100% free of charge and participates in the Alternatives to Abortion Program, I applaud your commitment to women in our state. Our staff walks with new parents by providing education and material support until their child is two years old – sometimes longer – mentoring many moms and dads who need it most in ways too many to list. Your commitment to care for children by extending the program beyond birth to 1 year of age, encourages me greatly.

I am also grateful you are considering the expansion of reimbursement for medical services. Our Center employs registered nurses for all medical appointments, including pregnancy testing and peer counseling for women who are deciding to parent, release for adoption, or terminate their pregnancy. We believe factual medical information is best delivered by medical professionals. We place a high premium on education in every encounter with our clients.

Once a positive pregnancy result is established, we provide a first-trimester ultrasound – or more than one as needed. We currently employ four nurses who have completed rigorous first-trimester ultrasound training. Further, every scan completed in our Center is read by a diagnostic radiologist at Altru Health System. Introducing this tiny human being to the parent who carries them and educating that parent in the stages of fetal human development, often tips the scale away from termination and toward LIFE. Based on a 5-year average, when women who were planning to end their pregnancy *found our services first*, they changed their minds 77% of the time. A first-trimester scan also accurately dates viable pregnancies and provides early warning of ectopic pregnancies which are not compatible with life and can be deadly for the mother. Our medical services are valuable and worthy of support.

In a culture where the messaging increasingly encourages sexual risk, we at Women's Pregnancy Center aim to care more deeply – not only meeting and treating the physical needs of our clients, but also addressing their emotional and spiritual health, as well. Testing for Sexually Transmitted Diseases and treating Sexually Transmitted Infections has opened more opportunities to know and serve our community with relational, individual education. Utilizing a \$6,000.00 grant from the North Dakota Department of Health, we conduct testing for HIV and Hepatitis C. Thankfully, the grant covers the testing supplies while we provide the nurse, the facility, etc. Doing our part is an investment we are proud to make.

Additional testing for chlamydia and gonorrhea is funded through our budget. Depending on behavioral risk (requiring additional samples), our lab expenses can be as high as \$40.00 per client. Right now, advertising for this service is strictly by word of mouth. If we were to receive reimbursement for the lab costs, I would confidently increase our advertising budget to reach more at-risk individuals between the ages of 16 to 24.

We know that by creating positive experiences within our walls before a pregnancy test is needed, our clients and the friends they tell, will *find us first* if they do someday face an unplanned pregnancy. That alone is reason enough to provide the extra testing, but it's not just about getting them through our door – it's about building knowledge so a poor decision made in their teens and early 20's doesn't prevent them from living a healthy future. By offering the treatment free of charge (as prescribed by our Medical Director, a licensed physician with Sandford in East Grand Forks, MN), we remove countless barriers to serving the most vulnerable. Even when the medication is more expensive due to known allergies, we shoulder the cost – because we genuinely care.

As a final word, I want to emphasize the value of supporting post-abortive healing options. I cannot overestimate the amount of pain I've heard from women and men who regret a past abortion decision. Whether they employ an active faith tradition or not, North Dakotans trend toward strong family values. The devastation of an abortion catches up with those who carry guilt and regret. Peer counseling has proven itself in this area, and I have personally witnessed the freedom and healing that comes when women who relate to abortion on a personal level, sit, discuss, and support each other. Hearts and minds are changed as stories are bravely shared. I believe this "sharing" has the power to make abortion unthinkable.

Historically, the Alternatives to Abortion funding and the grant for testing supplies has accounted for roughly 5% of our annual budget. I am grateful for that bit of budget breathing room as we push forward to make a difference in Grand Forks.

Again, I thank you for considering a funding level with which we can do so much more for our communities. Building a culture of LIFE across our state is my personal mindset, and I believe it is yours, too.

Sincerely,

Jill Chandler

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