

NEUTRAL Conferee

Testimony to:
Health & Human Services Committee
Re: HB No. 2789

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I am offering written testimony for this hearing to inform the Health & Human Services Committee of the progress of the Alternatives to Abortion Program enacted by the Kansas Legislature last year.

Before turning to the history of this Program, I would first like to point out the sad reality for many Kansas women today as they face the prospect of an unexpected pregnancy – they feel like they have nowhere to turn. At their most vulnerable time in their life, these women often feel alone, without hope, and uncertain of the best decision for their future and the future of their family. And the overriding reason they may often feel abortion is the only choice is clear – a lack of support. (Please see the attachment referring to a peer-reviewed study documenting this reality.) Here's a story from one girl named Ashley:

"Just when I thought my life was getting lined out and I was seeing a path to finishing High School and then getting some job training, I ended up pregnant.

The father is nowhere in the picture and my parents, who are very disappointed in me, say that due to my bad decisions, I had to fix this.

Thinking there was no other choice, I was going to look into having an abortion - even though I always considered myself pro-life. I didn't think I had any choice. My girlfriend then told me about some free help & support that I could get from the Pregnancy Center in a town nearby. I drove there in tears and they were so kind & understanding of my situation. They talked with me and reassured me that they help many women in the same situation. They even gave me some maternity clothes and offered to help me find a place to live if I needed.

Fast forward, I am now the very proud Momma of a beautiful 3-month-old daughter and I know that if these kind and caring pregnancy center had not given me the support and information right when I needed it, I'd be forever regretting a decision that I would have felt forced into."

No woman should face an unexpected pregnancy alone. And to support these women at this critical juncture in their lives, the Kansas Legislature appropriated \$2 million for the Alternatives to Abortion Program in April of 2023. It directed the State Treasurer to administer the Program. And in July, the Treasurer's Office initiated a request for proposals to select a qualified Kansas non-profit organization to carry out the provisions of the Program.

The Kansas Pregnancy Care Network (KPCN) is registered Kansas non-profit governed by clear bylaws and an all-volunteer, unpaid Board of Directors. In August, KPCN submitted our bid and was selected from the three eligible bids that were submitted to the Department of Administration, and a contract was signed in September. Our KPCN bid was modeled upon successful programs in multiple other states across the nation and included a combined two decades of operational expertise, a proven and secure online software system, and the voluntary assistance from experts across the nation. Throughout this entire process, our State Treasurer Steven Johnson and his office have been extremely well-organized and efficient in administering the program, which has allowed KPCN to be effective in a timely manner.

Once the contract was finalized and staff hired, the KPCN Program was formally launched in October. It was determined that there are an estimated 50+ non-profit pro-life providers in Kansas that serve vulnerable pregnant women and their families, most of whom currently receive no government funding or tax credits. These providers include Pregnancy Care Centers, Adoption Agencies, Maternity Homes, and other social service organizations. In a fee-for-services model, the Program provides resources to women facing unplanned pregnancies as well as families that already have young children up to 24 months. Qualifying clients in this Program are pregnant women, the father of an unborn child, adoptive parents, biological/adoptive parents of a child up to 24 months, or the parents who have suffered the loss of a child. Among other services, The Program offers counseling, education, and material assistance to vulnerable pregnant women and their families.

Under our contract, KPCN is quickly developing a state-wide network of pregnancy support centers, residential units, and social service organizations that offer specialized services, education, and support to meet the needs of pregnant women at perhaps the most vulnerable time in their life. These non-profit organization, staffed mostly with selfless volunteers, provide confidential support, encouragement, and practical assistance at no cost to women so they can feel supported and confident in choosing childbirth. These subcontractors are thoroughly vetted and are continually monitored to ensure compliance with the state contract and standards of care. Using our efficient online software, they bill KPCN directly for services and materials, as specified in the statute, and are paid from funds distributed by the State Treasurer.

As Kansans, we should be proud of these non-profit organizations. Some have been operating for more than 50 years – some only a few years. They provide these desperately needed services with no pressure on their clients and with no obligation from them. It is comprehensive care. It is free care. And it is provided with an absolute commitment to privacy. They often operate with little publicity, usually with shoe-string budgets, and selflessly dedicate them to meeting the support needs of these vulnerable women.

Since the launch, KPCN has already conducted Program information meetings with 30+ pregnancy resource centers, maternity homes, adoption agencies, and social service organizations. The response has been phenomenal, and KPCN has already approved ten entities as Subcontractors, another twenty subcontractors are in various stages for approval to participate in the Program, and ongoing outreach continues with dozens other potential Program subcontractors. Without a doubt, I can report that the need is immense and growing as more and more women are desperately searching for the help, assistance and support they deserve.

In only four months of operation, this Program has already assisted more than 450 Kansas women and their families – in all corners of the state - to support them in their often-demanding pregnancy and parenting situations. To enhance the pregnancy and parenting outcome for these families, we are providing a wide range of social services and materials to mothers who often have nowhere else to turn. These services include counseling and mentoring; care coordination for prenatal services, including connecting clients to health programs; providing educational materials and information about pregnancy and parenting; referrals to county and social service programs, including child care, transportation, housing and state and federal benefit programs; classes on life skills, budgeting, parenting, stress management, job training, job placement and obtaining a GED certificate; providing material items including, but not limited to, car seats, cribs, maternity clothes, infant diapers and formula; and support groups in maternity homes.

Additionally, the Legislature also authorized a companion Program, the Alternatives to Abortion Public Awareness Program, and it was included in our contract with the state. To meet the requirements of this Program, KPCN has developed and pioneered a state-wide website that provides a geographically indexed and searchable list of free pregnancy compassion services and nonprofit Kansas providers available to meet the needs of pregnant vulnerable women in our state. Additionally, we have recently launched a free toll-free phone number to connect these women to these assistance centers, and soon, a texting option will be offered to further ease the ability to connect with these nonprofit places of assistance.

I have provided below some of the feedback we have already received from the non-profit providers all across the state. As you will read, this Program is already making a huge difference in the lives of women, children, and families in Kansas. The \$2 million appropriated by the Legislature is greatly appreciated, but the needs are demonstrably greater and growing, given the current economic and social times.

Thank you in advance for this opportunity to provide testimony of how important this Program is to vulnerable women in Kansas and their families.

REST IS EXTRA

. Some of the positive feedback we've heard from our Subcontractors includes the following:

- The ability to rent additional office space to offer pregnancy & parenting classes
- The ability to expand office hours
- The ability to hire additional full-time and bi-lingual staff
- The ability to start the process of opening a new facility in a neighboring town
- The ability to open a pregnancy resource center affiliated with their adoption agency
- The ability to consider opening a maternity home
- And the list goes on....

486 clients