

Statement of Heidi Matzke

Senate Committee on the Judiciary A Post-Roe America: The Legal Consequences of the *Dobbs* Decision

July 12, 2022

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Grassley, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Heidi Matzke, and I am the executive director of the Alternatives Pregnancy Center in Sacramento, California.

I came into this role by a roundabout road that began in a very emotional place. A number of years ago, on the day my sister and I were supposed to leave for college, she showed up at my door and just ... collapsed. I said, "Well, what's your problem?" And she looked up and said, "I'm pregnant."

I still remember the fear in her eyes. I see that fear, almost every day, in the eyes of the women who come into our center. They need help. They need someone to talk to. They need hope.

I know, because my sister needed all those things. My family needed all those things – and we found them in a local pregnancy care center. And years later, because I wanted to give that same help and hope and support to others ... I became the director of a pregnancy center.

As an organization of mostly women serving women, the staff of our clinic offers our patients compassionate, holistic care – ministering in whatever gentle ways we can to their physical, emotional, and even spiritual needs.

And so it grieves me that, in the weeks leading up to and following the Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, a great deal of misinformation has been spread about pregnancy centers, including public statements made by the administration and by members of this esteemed body.

In early June, Attorney General Bonta issued a misleading consumer alert about California's pregnancy care centers. Efforts also appear to be underway in some quarters to use the power of the U.S. Congress to restrict and even outlaw the crucial work of the nearly 3,000 pregnancy care centers serving women across this country.

That would be a devastating blow to women, particularly the hundreds of thousands who each year come through the doors of clinics like the one I run ... looking for free medical care, emotional support, and practical resources that will enable them to carry their pregnancies to term. It would also be a triumph of ignorance about who we are and what we do, and about the reality of what "choice" means for women in America today.

Despite the Attorney General's unsubstantiated statement, we celebrate our differences. Not every woman faced with a difficult situation desires abortion. Alternatives Pregnancy Center, and the many others like us, provide free essential services to expectant mothers.

Let me share with you what we actually do.

We offer the women who come to us pregnancy tests. Ultrasounds. Prenatal care up to 24 weeks. Well-woman visits. We test for and treat sexually transmitted diseases. We offer abortion pill reversals, abortion recovery counseling, and parenting classes.

If finances are a problem, we have diapers, wipes, and baby formula. Baby food, baby clothing, and baby supplies. We offer community resource and adoption referrals. If a woman needs a hotel room, we'll pay for that. It doesn't matter who she is, where she comes from, or her past.

If she wants to hear them, we explain her three options: parenting, adoption, or abortion. Even if she chooses abortion, we continue to be there for her, after the procedure. For years, if necessary.

Our clinic alone provides over \$1 million in free services each year to the women who come to us. We charge nothing. That means we never financially benefit from any choice a woman makes. We make no profit of any kind off the women who turn to us for help.

Ironically, many of our patients are referred to us by a well-known abortion provider. A woman goes to them for an ultrasound, but that provider isn't willing to perform one for a woman not already determined to abort her child. So, they send her to us, because we offer the ultrasound for free ... regardless of what the woman chooses to do about her baby.

At our center, ultrasounds and all of our other services are provided by a staff of licensed medical professionals, including OBGYNs, NPs, RNs, and medical assistants. They are deeply compassionate people, because most of them have experienced the effects of abortion themselves; our OB-GYN used to perform them.

When a woman comes in, so afraid of what an unplanned pregnancy will mean for her life, her ambitions, her relationships, we don't urge her to make a decision. We listen. We try to hear her heart. We offer professional services and emotional and spiritual support.

And what we offer is sorely needed. In 2019, the CDC reported nearly 630,000 abortions in America. Many of those women chose abortion because they lacked the resources and support they needed to confidently choose to parent. The kind of resources and support provided by clinics like ours.

Over the last five years, pregnancy care centers like ours have served nearly two million women who were faced with an unplanned pregnancy and wanted an alternative to abortion.

But these facts are not being reported. Instead – whether from ignorance about who we are or from the spreading of deliberate misinformation about what we do – pregnancy care centers from coast to coast have been the targets of violent assaults of vandalism and hateful attacks online

and in the media. Just last week, we had to call police when a man approached our care center with threats and a machete.

Our Sacramento center has been forced to hire 24-hour on-site security. We've had to reinforce doors and bulletproof walls and windows. We've removed rocks from our landscaping to inhibit vandalism. We've painted the building with graffiti-proof coating. We've added cameras, armed our staff with pepper spray, and stopped running our mobile clinic because of threats of violence.

My staff and I live on constant alert. We have been forced to expend valuable resources on these crucial safety measures, so we can continue to provide the women of our community with free medical care and services in the safest possible environment.

What we do is worth the risk. There is a place for clinics like ours in every community – a place for women facing unplanned pregnancies who are seeking dependable medical resources in a safe, caring environment during one of the most difficult times of their lives.

A place where people will encourage them – not exploit them – in their moment of greatest vulnerability.

“You are pregnant” – those are three of the most powerful words a woman will hear in her life. For some, the words bring incredible joy; for others, incredible fear. Both types of women deserve support. And we are here for them both.

We have been given a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to serve and empower women to live full and successful lives. It is an honor to wake up each morning to serve women and families in my community, and I thank you for the privilege of sharing with you a brief glimpse of the hope, service, and compassion our pregnancy center – and so many others across this great country – provide each day.

Thank you.