

Prepared Testimony of Mr. Kevin Bagatta Executive Director, Real Alternatives, Inc.

I. Introduction

Good morning, I am Kevin Bagatta President of Real Alternatives, a charitable nonprofit corporation based in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. I am grateful and honored to be invited to appear at this important hearing today.

This past December marked the second anniversary of a unique state-funded program that reaches out and empowers women experiencing one of the most devastating crisis of their lives -- an unplanned pregnancy. This program, known as Project Women In Need (WIN), truly empowers these women by utilizing pregnancy centers, adoption agencies, and maternity homes throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to provide a nonjudgemental atmosphere of understanding and support during and after their pregnancy. Since March of 1996, over 14,000 women have been provided viable alternative to abortion services.

These traumatized women are many times thrown into unbelievable circumstances. A boyfriend, on learning of the pregnancy tells the woman to abort the child or face this crisis alone -- at our pregnancy centers she receives ongoing counseling support through her pregnancy, childbirth, and beyond. Many times a young woman is anxious about the disappointment her parents will feel about her pregnancy and is afraid to tell them -- for this woman we offer a counselor to go with her and help her tell her parents and then enlist their assistance to work as a team supporting their daughter. Other times the woman has no place to live because of her pregnancy -- for this woman we offer shelter - a safe haven- in addition to a myriad of other services.

This program was created in 1994 by then Governor Robert P. Casey and continues today through Governor Tom Ridge's administration. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has privatized the administration of this government service. The program is funded in the Commonwealth through the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare which in turn contracts out the administration of services through Real Alternatives, the prime contractor. Real Alternatives then subcontracts out a fee-for-services contract with 91 pregnancy centers, adoption agencies, and maternity homes. These centers range from small, rural pregnancy centers to large, urban Social Services Agencies. Some are homes where a young woman can stay and receive preparation to parent, others are there to support the woman when adoption is the chosen option. Whatever types of center we have, whether staffed with volunteers or employees, we see the same motivation in the work they do -- LOVE for these women as if they were their own daughters.

II. Direct Client Services

Pregnancy centers, adoption agencies and maternity homes have always provided free services to all women who seek alternatives to abortion services. They have been doing it for over 25 years. Funding to operate and provide these free services has historically come from charitable donations and still does. In addition, due to funding limits, many of these centers rely only on volunteer counselors and therefore have limited hours of operation. This was the picture in Pennsylvania and is the picture across the United States in our pregnancy centers, adoption agencies and maternity homes. Under Project WIN however, these centers are reimbursed for the free services they provide a certain "eligible" client. That "eligible" client is a client who is:

1. A woman whose gross family income is under 185% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines; is
2. pregnant or thinks she is; or
3. has a child under 12 months old.

The services provided by Project WIN centers vary according to the needs of each client. The following are a sample of the free services women in need have access to:

- pregnancy test kits (self-administered);
- education on fetal development and the health and nutritional needs of pregnant women, including books, brochures, fetal models, etc.;
- abortion information, i.e., what it is and what it does;
- information on the risks of sexually transmitted diseases;
- pre- and post-natal care education;
- parenting classes, pregnancy classes, childbirth classes, chastity classes;
- education referrals for upgrading skills or obtaining a G.E.D.;

- child care referrals;
- advertising services so clients are able to find these centers;
- access to information on medical care, hospital clinics, doctors, health care facilities, and other professional services;
- assistance with identifying drug and alcohol programs if needed;
- information on Women Infants and Children (WIC) programs;
- adoption service information;
- the availability of job service and vocational training opportunities;
- life-skill training for parenting and nutritional needs;
- availability of other community social services;
- teen pregnancy programs;
- tangible aid in the form of baby and maternity clothes, infant food pantries, and infant furniture pantries; and
- other programs for the physical and emotional needs of the pregnant woman.

III. Indirect Client Services

In addition to the direct client services provided by the Project WIN centers, Real Alternatives, as the prime contractor, provides indirect support to clients by supporting the Project WIN centers (subcontractors). For example, Real Alternatives operates the state-wide toll-free referral system for the 91 centers. All a woman in need has to do in Pennsylvania is call 1-888-LIFE-AID, and she will be patched to the nearest Project WIN center in her county. Since May of 1997, over 750 calls have been received by our counselors. The success of this toll-free referral system is obviously tied directly to the advertisement of the toll-free telephone number. Real Alternatives provides that advertisement throughout the Commonwealth using television campaigns. As the advertising campaign provides new clients, Project WIN provides New Center Development grants for the subcontractors to open new centers to meet the increasing demand for services. Finally, to make the most of Project WIN's buying strength, Real Alternatives purchases in-bulk educational material that is handed out to our client when they receive service at a Project WIN center.

IV. The Result

Thirty months ago when Project WIN began, we explained to others how we would lower abortions in Pennsylvania. Very simply, providing this additional funding to pregnancy centers, adoption agencies and maternity homes enables them to invest these funds to hire more counselors, stay open longer hours, and open more centers thereby seeing more women to provide alternatives to abortion. This is

exactly what has happened. In March of 1996, there were 72 Project WIN centers, now there are 91 centers. This growth in centers has resulted in an increase of new clients served by 25% over the last fiscal year. (See Project WIN statistics attached). In 1996, the year Project WIN just started, Pennsylvania's abortion rate declined to 14 per 1000 females aged 15-44 years, the lowest annual rate ever recorded.

These of course are just statistics. We do need statistics to measure success and help us chart our course. Behind these numbers however, are real women in crisis -- and we are there for them. In addition to those I mentioned before, there was the young teen who had a negative pregnancy test -- we took the opportunity to counsel her on chastity and included the risks of her life style choices with regard to sexually transmitted diseases. Our goal is to counsel her so she will not come through our pregnancy center doors again. There was another young woman, seven months pregnant, homeless, abandoned by the baby's father. She saw the Project WIN television ad at a friend's house and called 1-888-LIFE-AID. Within 48 hours of her call, she was in her own bedroom at a Project WIN funded maternity home, had been examined by a nurse and was receiving pre-natal care for herself and her child in a safe, nurturing environment. Within days, she was receiving professional counseling, taking nutrition classes and began working toward her GED. Today she is the proud mother of a baby boy and is putting her life in order.

During an annual Site Monitoring Review of another Project WIN maternity home, I passed a computer room where a teen was sitting at a computer learning how to type. Next to her, in an infant carrier was her two month old baby sleeping away without a care in the world. As I saw this scene through the doorway I thought about what an outstanding example of an Alternative to Abortion. Here this young woman was receiving care and comfort in a safe environment to raise her baby while she helped herself through this detour in her life, an unplanned pregnancy. Here the young woman had a dedicated staff of individuals who believed they should provide their resident with life changing services and support.

Perhaps Former Governor Casey summed it up best when he addressed our Second Annual Project Women In Need Subcontractors banquet, he said, "[o]ur business is to fight the poison of hopelessness with love." That is what Pennsylvania's Project Women In Need does, that is the right thing to do, that is what all of America should do.

[Return to Hearing Summary](#)

[Return to Home Page of House Small Business Committee](#)

The United States House of Representatives
105th Congress, Second Session
Committee on Small Business
2361 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
Phone: (202) 225-5821 Fax: (202) 225-3587
Email: sembiz@mail.house.gov