

FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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MICHAEL B. SHEEDY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



November 13, 2017

The Honorable Travis Cummings
214 House Office Building
402 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

RE: Support for Pregnancy Support Services in HB 41 (Toledo)

Dear Chairman Cummings:

HB 41 solidifies the Florida Pregnancy Support Services Program (FPSSP) in Florida's policy framework. This will better allow for its growth and expansion as it supports vulnerable women in unexpected pregnancies who choose to continue their pregnancies. In short, it grants vulnerable women support in choosing to continue their pregnancies by removing some material pressures and providing a range of supports.

Pregnancy Support Services are valuable to the state of Florida

A Guttmacher Institute study found that approximately 59% of Florida pregnancies in 2010 were "unintentional;" of those, 38% resulted in abortion.*

Through the FPSSP's network of 105 local, non-profit pregnancy support centers throughout the state, pregnancy support services are extended to women and their families. Services include free pregnancy tests, peer counseling and referrals, classes on pregnancy, childbirth, parenting, and life skills. Clients are eligible to receive services for up to one year after the child's birth.

Recent program expansion to include women's wellness services

The Department of Health has received an annual appropriation of \$2 million for operational expenses since the program's inception in 2005. In the 2016-17 budget year, the appropriation was increased to \$4 million and proviso language expanded the program to include women's wellness services. Since then, seventeen contracted providers have launched the wellness program, subcontracting with local healthcare providers.

Department of Health provides oversight to ensure quality

There are many independent pregnancy support service centers in the state of Florida. However, the Department of Health ensures that the centers comprising the Florida Pregnancy Care Network:

- utilize 90% of contract funds in direct client services
- conduct background screenings of all paid staff and volunteers who provide direct services to eligible clients who are minors, elderly, or have a disability
- provide informational materials that are current and accurate, with reference source of medical statements
- contract with the Department of Health, adhering to annual compliance monitoring and defined contract deliverables

While many pregnancy support service centers were established by people of faith, non-religious organizations may join the Florida Pregnancy Care Network and state funds only reimburse non-religious content and services.

We appreciate your committee's consideration of this good bill, and encourage support for it. We remain ready to address any questions that may arise.

Sincerely,



Michael B. Sheedy

cc: Members of House Health and Human Services Committee
The Honorable Jackie Toledo
Most Rev. Thomas G. Wenski, Archbishop of Miami and FCCB President
Most Rev. Felipe J. Estevez, Bishop of St. Augustine & FCCB Respect Life Moderator
Ingrid M. Delgado, Associate for Social Concerns/Respect Life

*Kost, Kathryn (2015, January). *Unintended Pregnancy Rates at the State Level: Estimates for 2010 and Trends Since 2002*. Retrieved from https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/stateup10.pdf