

Minnesota Now (MPR) | Minnesota Now Abortion rights advocates push to end state funding for "crisis pregnancy centers" 01GQG5EZGD09793V3M33M30FDP

CATHY WURZER: So the legislature will get the governor's budget tomorrow. Also at the Capitol this week, the Minnesota State Senate is due to take up a bill that would enshrine the right to an abortion into state law. Now, this is a similar bill that the State House passed last week.

In addition to those measures that would protect the right to an abortion, Governor Walz has proposed ending state funding for pregnancy crisis centers across the state. Anti-abortion advocates say these centers offer important information to pregnant people about their other options. But critics say they mislead and intimidate patients with the sole purpose of preventing them from getting abortions and contraception.

They are more common across the state than abortion clinics and can play a major role in someone's experience of an unexpected pregnancy. *MPR* Digital Producer Sam Stroozas wrote about this. She's with us right now. Hey, Sam.

SAM Hey, Cathy. How are you?

STROOZAS:

CATHY I'm fine. Thanks for doing this. Say, for folks who are not familiar, what are crisis pregnancy centers? And how do
WURZER: they end up receiving state money?

SAM So crisis pregnancy centers are non-medical anti-abortion organizations. They're centers that are against
STROOZAS: abortion and encourage pregnant people to carry their pregnancies to term. They began receiving funding in 2005. Former Governor Pallante introduced the Positive Alternatives Fund, and under this places that discourage abortion could get state funding. So then they started applying for state funding and for grants.

So besides the 25 anti-abortion centers on the list, there are also two other places, the Duluth Prison Project and division of Indian work that also get funding from the grant. But their work is a lot separate. So those in support of CPCs do argue that they provide essential services, but those again say that it's time to reduce the funding.

CATHY What services do they offer? Do they offer supports for pregnant people? Do they offer adoption services? I don't
WURZER: understand. What do they offer specifically?

SAM Exactly. So that's the thing that's fuzzy and a little bit hard to understand. So if you go to a website, a lot of times
STROOZAS: they look very similar to websites like Planned Parenthood or Abortion Clinics. They use a lot of the same names. So a lot of their titles are pregnancy choices, life care, stuff like that.

But if you do search abortion on the website, they usually do say they will not provide abortion. So a lot of the stuff that people are arguing that they do provide may be things like car seats and formula or classes that people can take. But in exchange for a lot of that, it's getting to hear this anti-abortion rhetoric that's prevalent at these centers.

CATHY How much money does the state give to these facilities?

WURZER:

SAM So it's about a five-year grant cycle. So within each grant cycle, they get about 3 and 1/2 million in funding. So
STROOZAS: some places get more than others. Within the funding application, they have to explain what services they provide. And then they have to follow certain stipulations.

So one of them, for example, is if someone comes in for a non-medical ultrasound, they have to provide characteristics of the fetus such as fingernail, growth hair, and then encourage them to carry to term. So a CPC in Alexandria, Minnesota got about \$106,000 for the last five-year cycle. And then Options for women in East St. Paul got almost about 200,000.

CATHY WURZER: Now, you wrote that Attorney General Keith Ellison released this consumer report last summer about crisis pregnancy centers. And he cited a report that described them as deceptive and coercive. What did you find in your reporting? Are these clinics a source of misinformation?

SAM STROOZAS: Yeah. So in the study it was called *Designed to Deceive*, and it's by the Alliance State Advocates for women's rights. Gender Justice, the Minnesota Organization is a part of the alliance. So within the report, they did find that about 6 to 3% of these CPCs make fake claims.

About double at the rate of CPCs and other states. 22 promote the abortion pill reversal, which is actually not a practice medication in any way. It encourages folks not to take the second part of their abortion pill as there's two different steps to it.

And as far as in my reporting, I think that I spoke to a lot of folks that had really unique stories and brought a lot to the table. And I think it was definitely voices that we haven't heard from before, such as a former volunteer who did volunteer at a center and is now advocating against them.

CATHY WURZER: DFL members in the House have this bill that would address the funding. What would that do specifically?

SAM STROOZAS: So right now, we know the DFLers have a hold on a lot of Minnesota politics. So they are introducing HF289, which is the positive pregnancy bill. This wouldn't completely end the funding, but it would divert the funding. So this would change the qualifications of those who could apply.

So in the current funding under Pallante stuff, it says that you have to not promote abortion. You have to-- it doesn't say that have to have any accurate information. So what would change is that in able to get the money, you would need to be providing medically accurate information. So you cannot say things like abortion causes breast cancer or infertility like a lot of places do now.

So the funding would be redirected mostly to reproductive health clinics across the state and would work to fund things such as reproductive health care, including abortion, prenatal care, and birth control.

CATHY WURZER: Now, if the state does stop funding these crisis pregnancy centers, you wrote in your piece, @mprnews.org, they won't disappear. So where else are they getting their money?

SAM STROOZAS: So there is about 90 CPCs in Minnesota. And compared to abortion clinics, there's eight. So they receive a lot of donations in general from anti-abortion folks. They are nonprofits. They don't have to pay their taxes.

Life Lakes Care Center in Forest Lake Minnesota had a revenue of about 300,000 in 2021, and that's not including the grant. So they may receive less funding, but their donations are still going strong. But if they're viewed as legitimate or not, that's really up to Minnesotans.

CATHY WURZER: And before you go. Have you had a chance to talk to some of these crisis pregnancy centers? What did they say about your reporting and their work?

SAM STROOZAS: So I did contact a few of them. I left calls. I left messages. I was able to get someone on the phone who said they were not comfortable interviewing from options east in Saint Paul. So they said no comment. So right now, we haven't really heard from them.

CATHY WURZER: Sam, thank you so much.

SAM STROOZAS: Thank you.

CATHY WURZER: We just heard from MPR Digital Producer Sam Stroozas. You can read her story her news story about crisis pregnancy centers in Minnesota and the possibility that the state will stop funding them on our website mprnews.org.