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Pregnancy Counselling Australia

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The Committee of Inquiry into Abortion Law Reform Health, Communities,
Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee

Dear Committee Members,

I write this submission as Coordinator of Pregnancy Counselling Australia. Our organization has been operating continuously for over 30 years. We are funded by independent donations. Since 2000 we have been available to callers 24 hours/day, 365 days/year. We receive approximately 1200 calls per year from women in crises relating to pregnancy. Some are considering abortion, while others are confused as a result of finding themselves pregnant, others suffer post-abortion grief.

Many women face unresolved feelings of grief, depression, suicidal thoughts following their abortion. I submit the following observations and call reports from actual calls made to our crisis line this year. Some alterations have been made to protect confidentiality. The destruction of an unborn child is an extreme and violent response to fear, depression and lack of support. Abortion is NOT the easy answer many of our callers expected in to be. They are left wounded emotionally and sometimes physically following their abortions. Frequently they are unable to share their pain with those close to them as abortion is so actively promoted as an easy answer to an unplanned pregnancy.

- *Anna called to talk about her past abortion of 13 years ago. She said that looking back, when she was 22, she did what she did because there was no way she could have had the baby under her circumstances. She felt sad about it but had to put it aside and get on with life. Since then she has married and had two miscarriages, and at age 35, she's given birth to a baby boy who is now three and a half months old. The memory of her abortion was brought sharply into focus when she had the 8-10 week baby scan. It hit hard to see that it had arms and legs – it was a real baby – not a blob of tissue which she had believed it to be when she had the abortion. Her immediate thought was - I've killed a baby! Since then, Anna has been aware that she needs to deal with the abortion because the pain won't go away. The counsellor empathised with Anna's shock revelation at the ultrasound of her baby, and said that she'd made the right move to deal with her pain; that there are trained counsellors for her post abortion grief who can help her to find healing.*

Anna was referred for appropriate post- abortion grief counselling.

- Julia had an abortion 7 months ago. She has been struggling quite a bit since then. After the initial relief, she has experienced night mares and is unable to sleep more than four hours/night. She feels she has lost the joy of living. She feels rejected and hurt by her former boyfriend who seems to be getting along just fine. They share the same circle of friends so she gets to see him quite often. Their friends don't know what's happened between them. He was upset about the abortion initially but the pregnancy had not been planned and he was not ready to be a father. Our counsellor assured her there was a road to recovery from her abortion. The counsellor empathised and talked things through, gave Julia some websites and referrals. www.silentnomoreawareness.org and Abortion Grief Counselling Assoc. Inc
- *Tracy called saying she had an abortion 2 weeks ago and was feeling very sad – almost depressed. She wondered if she should seek further help. Her partner is supportive. They thought that they had made the right decision at the time but were not expecting to feel like this. She told counsellor that her sleep pattern was disrupted. The counsellor explained that it is normal to feel grief after an abortion and referred her to on-going post-abortion counselling. The counsellor asked whether she'd received counselling before the abortion - she said it had been offered but she felt strongly beforehand that abortion was the right decision.*
- Calli said that she is married with a daughter 4 years of age. She and her husband have found out yesterday that she is 5 weeks pregnant. Calli indicated that she would like to have the baby but her husband would like her to terminate. Calli explained that she had a termination when she was a teenager and it was a traumatic experience, which she does not wish to repeat. Calli reported that she had plans with her husband to have another child next year which she was looking forward to, however upon yesterday's discovery of her unexpected pregnancy, Calli's husband stated that he did not want to have a second child at all. Calli stated that she was dismayed and disappointed at her husband's change of mind. Calli explained that she felt abandoned and was given false hope of having another child. Calli stated that her husband's reason wanting her to terminate was due to finances. Calli indicated that her husband has threatened to leave if she continues with pregnancy, hence she feels torn as she cannot put herself through another termination, and at the same time she loves her husband. Calli indicated that one of the biggest challenge presently was that her husband does not understand her pain and is demanding her to do what he wants. She explained that she does not wish to resent her husband for pushing her to terminate.
- *"Hello, I need face to face counselling. It's post...post... she began to cry. The counsellor asked if it was after a termination. "Yes, but it was years ago – 10 years ago. I don't know why I am feeling like this now." When asked if it was an anniversary she said yes. She was coerced by her boyfriend - he said she didn't need to tell anyone else so no-one would ever know. So she's never spoken to anyone close to her about it. Lately she's been having awful night mares She also said that she's never been able to have another baby and now that she's 39 she might never have a baby – this makes her very sad. She was referred for post- abortion counselling.*
- Wendy phoned - she is 7.5 weeks pregnant with baby #4. Husband wants her to abort because baby will be a drain on finances and his time. She's had an abortion before and doesn't want another one. She's booked the abortion but "I'm not sure I can go through with it." I've seen the baby on the ultrasound and I saw it's heart beating.
- *"Hello, I hope you can help me. My boyfriend says he wants me to have an abortion. I went to the abortion clinic this morning but I was crying so much that the nurse said I wasn't ready to go through with it today. I already have a little*

boy and I know this is a baby. I wish it (abortion) wasn't legal, then he couldn't put this pressure on me. I don't know what to do." This caller was helped to articulate the support networks she had in her life and those networks available in her community. She was grateful for the help she received.

The destruction of an unborn child is an extreme and violent response to fear, depression and lack of support. Abortion is NOT the easy answer many of our callers expected it to be. They are left wounded emotionally and sometimes physically following their abortions. Frequently they are unable to share their pain with those close to them as abortion is so actively promoted as an easy answer to an unplanned pregnancy.

These reports are just a small sample of the calls that we receive.

When women face unplanned pregnancies, they desire support from their partners and an assurance that the father of their baby will be there for them and their unborn baby.

Some women, who initially feel relief following their abortion, are surprised by the grief that they encounter in the weeks, months and often, years following their abortion.

When a woman becomes pregnant the hormones that maintain the pregnancy promote a profound bond between the mother and her unborn child. She is unprepared for the deep sense of loss and grief she feels following her abortion.

When abortion is decriminalized, women are often coerced by those around them – their parents, their teachers, the father of the baby - to undergo an abortion. Simply knowing that abortion is legal can be enough to persuade women to go against their own conscience and terminate their pregnancy. However, as these call reports demonstrate, deep down they know that they have destroyed or will be destroying the life of their unborn baby.

I urge the Queensland Parliament to reject the [Abortion Law Reform \(Women's Right to Choose\) Amendment Bill 2016](#), as put forward by Rob Pyne MP.

Abortion is NOT a compassionate response to an unplanned pregnancy. Women deserve better than abortion.

Yours sincerely,

Lois Dean

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