

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Laurie Kroeger. I am a co-director of Birthright of Manchester (located at 448 Donald Street in Bedford), one of New Hampshire's 19 Pregnancy Resource Centers and one of three Birthright chapters in New Hampshire.

I support HB Bill 1416.

This is Birthright's **54<sup>th</sup> year of service** to thousands of women and children in the greater Manchester area. Our chapter was patterned after the Birthright International crisis pregnancy center founded by Louise Summerhill in Canada. The name "Birthright" evolved from the guiding principle that "it is the right of every pregnant woman to give birth and the right of every child to be born."

Birthright services are always free, confidential, and available to any woman regardless of age, race, circumstances, religion, marital status or financial situation. Staffed totally by volunteers, Birthright offers compassionate support to all who enter our doors.

What we at Birthright do is offer nonjudgmental support, referrals, and material supplies on a monthly basis to those needing assistance with newborns and children up to two years of age.

What Birthright *does not do* is use scare tactics or pressure; we don't show abortion slides or pictures; we don't picket abortion clinics or evangelize.

You have heard it said, "Everyone is dealing with something that you know nothing about, so be nice." While it is true that we do not know many details of the women who come through our doors, we at Birthright understand the importance of being supportive and nonjudgmental of anyone dealing with an unplanned pregnancy.

The volunteers at our office have received desperate calls from women who need to flee dangerous situations and make a fresh start with their babies. We have assisted women dealing with domestic violence, homelessness, fires or break-ins, and unemployment. Many times, they had few possessions and were happy to receive the items we offered for their babies. I remember a new mom who moved to New Hampshire with basically nothing; she needed not only diapers and baby clothing, but referrals to agencies who could help her resettle in a safe place.

Recently, the mother of a large family came in with a new baby in need of our services. She didn't speak English and depended on her oldest daughter, who speaks English very well, to get registered. For many of our clients, English is a second language, and some, who don't speak English at all, bring someone who can translate for them. We cannot possibly understand the struggles that families face in their commitment to care for their babies, but we are there to help in whatever way we can.

Over the past five years the number of client visits has increased steadily, making Birthright of Manchester the busiest Birthright office in New England. Over 525 client-visits were made to our office this past year alone. At each visit diapers and other hygiene items that are not covered by most public assistance programs are given to help support the babies' needs.

Most babies use between 6-10 diapers per day...that's up to 70 diapers per week and over 250 per month. Most of our clients find it difficult to afford the expense of buying that many diapers and appreciate receiving a large box of diapers and clothing from Birthright once a month to help carry them over. Last year alone we gave out some 50,000 individual diapers from the stock on hand that are donated through various diaper drives by area organizations and church groups.

Recently, Vice President J. D. Vance and his wife Usha announced they are expecting their fourth child. Usha asked that in place of gifts to them, they would be honored if donations could be made to local diaper banks to help families in need. Birthright would greatly welcome any unsolicited diaper donations to replenish our ever-dwindling supply.

The Birthright of Manchester office had its first telephone listing in 1972 and continues to this day to offer help and support to those women who find themselves in unplanned pregnancies as an alternative to abortion. We hope to continue that support for many more years to come.

Thank you.