

VOX

States are using welfare money to fund anti-abortion propaganda

Updated by [Emily Crockett](#) @emilycrockett emily@vox.com Oct 3, 2016, 1:10p

TWEET



Photo by Olivier Douliery/Getty Images

Several states are siphoning money intended for welfare programs to fund “crisis pregnancy centers,” which are known for trying to dupe women out of seeking abortions by using misleading or completely false information.

According to a [new report](#) by Bryce Covert and Josh Israel of ThinkProgress, seven states (Missouri, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, North Dakota, and Texas) are funding crisis pregnancy centers using welfare funds from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant program.

While this doesn’t appear to be illegal, using welfare funds in this way is questionable at best. As Covert and Israel explain, state spending on TANF is supposed to fulfill at least one of four purposes: providing assistance to needy families, promoting job preparation and work, preventing and reducing out-of-wedlock pregnancies, or encouraging marriage and two-parent families.

But it’s hard to see how crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs) fulfill any of these goals — and there’s good evidence to suggest that they do just the opposite.

Crisis pregnancy centers aren't medically licensed, and they lie to women about abortion

CPC staff members may wear [white coats](#) and give women free ultrasounds, but they often have no medical training; one employee reportedly told a woman that her [IUD](#) was a fetus.

CPC employees may claim that an abortion will perforate your uterus and make you infertile (a possible but [incredibly rare](#) complication of abortion), or that it causes breast cancer or mental illness (both of these connections have been thoroughly [rejected](#) by reviews of the [evidence](#)) — and ignore the fact that the risk of death from childbirth is [14 times higher](#) than for abortion, or that most women [report](#) feeling relieved after an abortion and don't regret it.

You might be familiar with CPCs from their billboard ads that say things like, "Pregnant? Scared? Need Help?" Many CPCs also used to run online ads alongside internet searches for the word "abortion" — at least before search engines like Google and Yahoo agreed to [take those ads down](#) due to concerns about false advertising.

That's because while CPCs [look a lot like](#) clinics that provide abortions and even set up shop near real reproductive health clinics, their sole purpose is to discourage women from having abortions.

And they often do so by tricking women into thinking that they're being given real medical advice, according to multiple in-depth investigations by [NARAL Pro-Choice America](#) and [Cosmopolitan](#). Susie Meister, a former CPC employee, also [recounted](#) for Vox how she was expected to deceive women as part of her job.

The first CPC was [opened](#) in the United States in 1967 by Robert Pearson. His handbook on how to run a CPC, which still guides these clinics' practices, has been "described by law-enforcement officials around the country as a 93-page guidebook of ways to mislead consumers," according to the [New York Times](#).

How can states get away with using welfare money to fund anti-abortion propaganda?

In short, states have incredibly broad latitude for how to spend their money. A spokesman for the US Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children & Families told ThinkProgress that HHS doesn't

“approve” state’s plans for how to spend their welfare grants; it just “determines completeness of the required elements of the federal law.”

Several states, ThinkProgress reported, gave no specific rationale at all for how funding CPCs fulfills the federal government’s four major requirements for welfare spending.

But several states claimed that, by promoting “alternatives to abortion” in the form of CPCs, they are fulfilling the federal requirements to either encourage marriage and two-parent families, or to prevent and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies.

But it’s hard to see how CPCs could prevent or reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies, since they directly encourage women with out-of-wedlock pregnancies to give birth. What’s more, CPCs also **discourage** contraception, and often mislead women about how it works — **claiming** that condoms are porous, for instance.

Meanwhile, some of these states are spending money on CPCs — which aren’t proven to help needy families at all — while slashing direct cash assistance to needy families, which is supposed to be the whole point of TANF. Even though Missouri has **drastically cut** its welfare rolls in the past five years, it spent \$4.3 million on CPCs in the most recent fiscal year.

But TANF funds are just one way that states use taxpayer dollars to fund these non-medical, ideologically anti-abortion pregnancy centers. Fifteen of the 28 states that sell **“Choose Life” license plates** funnel the proceeds directly to CPCs.