



**A Post-Roe PA: Deceptive Practices of Anti-Abortion Centers
PA Joint Democratic Policy Committee Roundtable Discussion
Testimony by Melissa Weiler Gerber, President & CEO, AccessMatters
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My name is Melissa Weiler Gerber and I serve as the President & CEO of AccessMatters, a public health organization with a focus on sexual and reproductive health. I am honored to be here today to speak on the critical topic of anti-abortion centers (commonly referred to as crisis pregnancy centers) in the state of Pennsylvania. I want to first thank the PA House and Senate Democratic Policy Committees for hosting this hearing and roundtable discussion.

AccessMatters opposes the use of public funds for anti-abortion centers, as the Commonwealth should not be endorsing and supporting the work of entities known to mislead and deceive people about personal health care decisions at particularly vulnerable moments in their lives. Instead, the Commonwealth should direct its support to programs and providers that provide client-centered, evidence-based, affirming, and non-judgmental sexual and reproductive health services that advance health equity and access across Pennsylvania. Access to sexual health information and sex education is vital to every person's health and well-being. All people have the right to access unbiased, evidence-based information so they can make informed decisions about their health.

To ensure this right is a reality for all Pennsylvanians, AccessMatters urges the Commonwealth to aid nonprofits and advocates in diversifying and/or enhancing sources of support to communities that otherwise may feel forced to rely on anti-abortion center services for various resources and services; such as, childcare resources like diapers, formula, and other baby supplies. The Commonwealth already has many trusted organizations with which to partner. AccessMatters, among many other healthcare providers, advocates, and reproductive health organizations in Pennsylvania, already provide many of the services that anti-abortion centers claim to provide, but without predatory practices.

AccessMatters' work reaches more than 100,000 people each year – across the Greater Philadelphia region, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and throughout the nation – positively impacting people's health and wellness. As a long-standing Title X grantee and a steward of several federal, state, and locally-funded programs related to sexual and reproductive health, perinatal and postpartum health, breast/chest and cervical cancer screening, and STIs/HIV, AccessMatters is a critical part of the region's healthcare safety net. We also provide training and capacity building services to health and human service professionals nationwide on topics related to sexual health and health equity, including the impact of racism on health outcomes.



A primary part of our work is ensuring adults and adolescents have access to affirming, evidence-based, and age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health information and care in their community from trusted, high-quality healthcare partners.

AccessMatters makes certain that sexual and reproductive health information is accessible by offering this information throughout our provider network and via our information hotline. These resources allow people to access medically-accurate and non-judgmental care, to allow people to make the best decisions for themselves. AccessMatters' Information Hotline is an information, referral, and counseling service that addresses a variety of reproductive and sexual health topics, including but not limited to pregnancy care, contraception methods, HIV/AIDS information, and STI testing. Since the recent *Dobbs* decision from the Supreme Court, AccessMatters has been experiencing increased calls related to tubal litigations and vasectomies and anticipates more calls related to sexual and reproductive health services, including abortion as the months progress.

Our Health Resource Center Program in Pennsylvania supports school and community-based sites offering a confidential, drop-in space where youth can go for non-judgmental, medically accurate sexual health education and counseling. This education and counseling model supports critical thinking around sexual activity, encourages healthy relationships, and promotes the benefits of both abstinence and safer sexual behavior. The Health Resource Center Program is built on the tenet that having a trusted adult available for youth to talk with about their sexual health, healthy relationships, and any other issues they may be facing is a critical component to youth development. All youth seen in this program are encouraged to talk to their families or another trusted adult about their sexual health.

Nationwide polling shows that the general public supports sex education in schools. Furthermore, research states that if people had access to sexual information and sex education that was evidence-based, medically accurate, and age appropriate in their youth, many of the poor health outcomes our programs seek to address among adults could be avoided.

There is clear support for people of all ages being able to access sexual health information, which underscores the importance of accurate, accessible information rather than the deceptive and misleading information anti-abortion centers are providing under the guise of medical services and counseling.

As we find ourselves navigating a post-Roe world, the need to ensure anti-abortion centers are not misleading people who are trying to obtain an abortion is even greater. Despite continued press coverage of the deceptive practices at anti-abortion centers throughout Pennsylvania, these centers continue to receive large state grants with what seems to be little to no accountability. It is vital that the Commonwealth take immediate action to redirect these resources to where they can have the most impact and ensure provision of service in Pennsylvania is not based on ideology but instead evidence-based, comprehensive care.



AccessMatters works to provide such care ourselves through our hotline and provider network, without the predatory practices that often exist at anti-abortion centers. AccessMatters recommends policy changes that would address the following:

- Identify existing gaps in all communities throughout the Commonwealth that are currently filled by anti-abortion centers and diversify or replace these services by supporting the expansion of existing resources to address those gaps
 - This includes but is not limited to:
 - sexual and reproductive health information and options, including but not limited to: contraception, pregnancy care and termination;
 - Tangible childcare resources like diapers, formula, and other baby supplies;
 - Other necessary resources for family planning and health, such as housing for people who are pregnant and their children.
- Support public health campaigns aimed at educating communities about the resources that are available to them, including:
 - Sexual and reproductive health services
 - WIC
 - Diaper banks
 - Perinatal and post-partum health services and resources
 - Insurance coverage or subsidized health services

We appreciate your time and consideration and look forward to further discussions about how we can collectively combat anti-abortion centers in Pennsylvania and ensure people are receiving affirming, evidence-based care.

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