

Bill to expose biased pregnancy advice

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PREGNANCY counselling services may have to admit offering biased advice if a parliamentary committee report to be released this week backs moves to legally force them.

A bill drawn up by Democrats senator Natasha Stott Despoja addresses a legal loophole through which voluntary and unpaid pregnancy counselling services are exempt from misleading and deceptive advertising laws.

The Senate community affairs references committee has also been looking at whether advice given by

Government-funded pregnancy counselling services is objective, non-directive, and includes information on all three pregnancy options: keeping the child, adopting or terminating the pregnancy.

Senator Stott Despoja's private members' bill has been under consideration by the committee.

It was referred with the support of Liberal senator Jeannie Ferris. It will report on Thursday.

Pregnancy Help Australia receives \$300,000 a year from the Government to provide "non-directive" advice, but it is philosophically and ethically opposed to referring women for abortions.

Senator Stott Despoja has worked

with Labor senator Claire Moore, Senator Ferris and Greens senators Kerry Nettle and Rachel Siewert on the bill.

On Wednesday, Reproductive Choice Australia and political activist group GetUp will present a cross-party group of female senators with a petition about the issue.

Signed by 15,000 people, the petition calls for an end to deceptive advertising by pregnancy counselling services.

The issue has the potential to blow up for the Government in a week when it will have its hands full dealing with dissenters over its proposed immigration laws.

Liberal senators Judith Troeth and Marise Payne are opposed to the

amended laws, which will deny asylum seekers the right to land in Australia or access the Australian justice system.

They have not decided whether they will cross the floor and help defeat the legislation, although Senator Payne has indicated she will probably vote with the Government.

Family First senator Steve Fielding is also locked in discussions with supporters and opponents while National Party senator Barnaby Joyce is playing his cards close to his chest.

The pregnancy bill, which passed acrimoniously through the House of Representatives on Thursday, comes before the Senate tomorrow.



SUPPORT: Natasha Stott Despoja.