

Governor Saves Pro-Life Program

Florida Gov. Charlie Crist salvaged a state-run crisis pregnancy program this week.

✖ **Jan. 29, 2009** – Florida Gov. Charlie Crist saved a state-run crisis pregnancy program this week by vetoing spending cuts that were a part of a \$1.2 billion budget cut. His decision was announced at a news conference Tuesday.

The action came after intensive lobbying by several pro-life legislators who were concerned about major cuts to the \$2 million budget of the Florida Pregnancy Support Services Program (FPSSP). While the legislators were able to save part of the program's money, Crist's line-item veto had the effect of restoring all of its original funding.

"The governor did veto the reduction ... because he feels it is important to continue to provide support for women facing these decisions," said Sterling Ivey, spokesman for Gov. Crist. "The governor also believes it is important to protect and safeguard the health care of those in most need of health services."

The man behind the scenes lobbying for the FPSSP's survival was freshman representative Scott Plakon, who had run on a pro-life platform. Chris Dorworth, a fellow lawmaker of Plakon's who also lobbied for the program, said he admired Plakon's commitment to the issue.

"The neat thing for me was to watch somebody get elected for whom social issues were of utmost importance, and the very first week he does something so impactful," Dorworth said. "Hundreds of lives will be saved and babies will be born that would not have been."

While Dorworth partially credits Plakon for keeping the crisis pregnancy program alive, Plakon sees his own influence in the bigger picture as limited. He expressed immense gratitude for the governor's decision in addition to the help of others.

"This is unusual for this to happen this way," Plakon acknowledged. "I appreciate the effort and support that chairman Dean Cannon and so many other House leaders put forth in making sure that innocent human life was protected in Florida."

Susan Grimsley, executive director of the Florida Pregnancy Care Network which administers the FPSSP, said the governor's actions, those who supported his veto, and Plakon's "tireless work," all worked together for the good. "We are thrilled," Grimsley said, "and consider this nothing short of a miracle. It is heartening to know that this program, which provides vital assistance to needy pregnant women, will continue to serve this vulnerable population."

The counseling and support services of the FPSSP solely promote and encourage childbirth.

Dorworth said one reason some Florida lawmakers wanted to abolish the program was partially due to a state senator incorrectly describing the FPSSP to other members as "an abstinence program." "It was in that context of-'We're firing teachers, yet we're going to continue to finance some abstinence program,'" that lawmakers decided to cut the FPSSP budget in half, which would've effectively shut it down, Dorworth said.

Among all U.S. states, Florida's state-run crisis pregnancy program is fairly unique. If the FPSSP had been abolished, it would've shut down invaluable services to roughly 15,000 would-be mothers a year, Plakon said.

If a young woman is pregnant, wavering and scared, "if [she has] concerns about what the future holds, worried about what

[her] parents are going to think, [about her] work situation—having someone to talk to can make the difference, because sometimes they don't have anyone they can call for advice," Dorworth said.

He added: "At the end of the day, you're left to represent your own values and your constituents and that comes above all else." —