

Crisis Pregnancy Centers Facing First Amendment Battle

✖ Efforts to stop the work of crisis pregnancy centers are gaining momentum.

In a move to keep these services up and running, the American Center for Law and Justice this week filed an amicus brief in federal appeals court on a Baltimore ordinance targeting crisis pregnancy centers, and is also challenging a similar ordinance in New York City.

Specifically, a federal district court in Baltimore declared earlier this year that a law requiring pro-life pregnancy centers to post signs indicating they do not offer abortions or birth control violates the free speech clause of the First Amendment.

“There’s a concerted effort on behalf of pro-abortion organizations to systematically target and punish crisis pregnancy centers in cities across America,” says CeCe Heil, senior counsel of the ACLJ. “The Baltimore ordinance was the first of its kind, and now other cities are following suit. We’re hopeful that these laws, including the one in New York City that we’re challenging in federal court, will ultimately be exposed for exactly what they do: violate the First Amendment rights of crisis pregnancy centers.”

In its amicus brief, the ACLJ argues the Baltimore law is not only unconstitutional, but is part of a national campaign by pro-abortion organizations to target crisis pregnancy centers across the country because of their religious and moral beliefs.

The ACLJ is also litigating a similar case against New York City, where an ordinance requires crisis pregnancy centers to post signs, add written language to advertising materials and

disclose verbally a list of services they do not provide, such as abortions or emergency contraception. The ACLJ filed its lawsuit challenging the New York City ordinance in March on behalf of numerous crisis pregnancy centers.

The ACLJ contends that the ordinance violates the constitutionally protected rights to freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and association, freedom of the press and due process of law as guaranteed by the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, as well as the New York state constitution. The ACLJ has asked the court to issue a preliminary injunction in the case, blocking enactment of the law. A hearing on that request is scheduled for June 15.