

New Austin Law Adds Insult to Pro-Life Injury

The city of Austin, Texas, has exchanged one constitutionally problematic sign law that affects pro-life centers with another—and pro-life organizations are seeking a new emergency order against the law in federal court.

In 2010, the Austin City Council passed an ordinance specifically to restrict the operations of **pro-life centers** that help women choose birth but that do not promote abortion.

The ordinance required centers such as LifeCare to display multiple signs at the entrance of the center before any staff had a chance to talk to women—signs that state that the center does not provide practices such as abortions. The ordinance imposed severe fines for failure to post the signs.

Austin LifeCare, a pregnancy resource center, filed a lawsuit against the city last year to contest the signs. In November, the city agreed to take a closer look at the law. But Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) attorneys say the new law is as bad as the one it replaced. The revised ordinance continues to require **pro-life centers** to post negative signs simply because the centers speak to women about pregnancy, but the ordinance effectively exempts abortion facilities.

“Pregnancy centers, which offer real help and hope to women, shouldn’t be punished by political allies of the abortion industry,” says Matt Bowman, ADF legal counsel. “The city should recognize that using a sleight of hand to force pro-life centers to post the message the city wants does not solve the **First Amendment** problems with the law. Courts around the country have been striking these types of laws down.”

A federal judge struck down a similar Baltimore ordinance in January 2011. In addition, ADF attorneys secured an initial

injunction against an ordinance in Montgomery County, Md., in March and later won an injunction that suspends an ordinance in New York City.

“Instead of engaging in political maneuvers, the city should see pro-life centers for what they are: an outreach to women in their own city who need real help and hope,” Samuel Casey, lead counsel and managing director of the Jubilee Campaign’s **Law of Life Project**, who is joining the ADF in the legal battle along with the Texas Center for the Defense of Life.