

Pregnancy Center Battle Heats Up Across U.S.

✖ Pregnancy centers in Maryland and New York are fighting hard against their city governments. Now similar facilities across the nation may also face this battle, in which the First Amendment should protect them.

The city of Baltimore is trying to enact a law forcing pro-life pregnancy centers to post signs stating they do not offer abortions or birth control referrals, which would no doubt deter some women from seeking these centers out for help.

The Alliance Defense Fund and the Jubilee Campaign's Law of Life Project filed a friend-of-the-court brief with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit on behalf of three pro-life medical associations. The American Center for Law and Justice has also filed a lawsuit challenging a similar New York City ordinance.

"Pregnancy centers, which offer real help and hope to women, shouldn't be punished by political allies of the abortion industry," ADF Legal Counsel Matt Bowman says. "As the district court ruled, the government cannot create special speech rules for people who want to talk about pregnancy choices. And it also cannot target pro-life centers for special sign requirements and fines while leaving speech by abortion clinics unregulated."

"This measure is troubling because it violates crisis pregnancy centers' First and Fourteenth Amendment rights, specifically protected by the constitution," CeCe Heil, American Center for Law and Justice senior counsel, told Reuters regarding the case in New York. "We are committed to protecting the rights of our clients and are urging the federal court to halt implementation of this ordinance and

declare it unconstitutional. Similar ordinances have already been struck down in federal court and we have no doubt that this ordinance will be rejected as well.”

The Greater Baltimore Center for Pregnancy Concerns won its case against the city of Baltimore when a federal court struck it down in January, but the city is now appealing the decision. The ordinance, enacted in late 2009, would slap the center with a \$150 fine per day it failed to issue certain disclaimers. The city places no sign requirements on Planned Parenthood and other abortion facilities regarding services they do not offer.

Pro-choice advocates in California are moving to enact a law in San Francisco that would require pregnancy centers to post whether they are antiabortion facilities that do not offer “comprehensive health care.”

“The public needs to know that these legislative attacks against pregnancy centers are focused on urban areas, the very areas where abortion providers are prevalent, support for abortion alternatives is lacking and abortion rates are skyrocketing,” Care Net President Melinda Delahoyde said. “Truly, we wouldn’t be seeing all this activity by abortion advocates if pregnancy centers weren’t making a difference in helping women choose alternatives to abortion.”

The ACLJ and CareNet also each filed a friend-of-the-court, in support of Greater Baltimore Center for Pregnancy Concerns, Inc.

According to its website, Care Net and their “network of more than 1,100 pregnancy centers offer hope to women facing unplanned pregnancies by providing practical help and emotional support.”