



## ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE

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OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

October 16, 2009

President Stephanie Rawlings-Blake  
Baltimore City Council  
Room 400, City Hall  
100 N. Holliday Street  
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear President Rawlings-Blake:

It has just come to our attention that a bill has been filed in the City of Baltimore, the purpose of which seems to be to harass charities which provide free services to pregnant women in need. Bill 09-0406, "Limited-Service Pregnancy Centers – Disclaimers," targets non-profit organizations whose mission is to help pregnant women carry a pregnancy to term. The bill would put onerous restrictions on pregnancy support centers by fining them \$500 per day for non-compliance with an ordinance that raises constitutional concerns. Although the Baltimore City Council may find Bill 09-0406 to be innocuous, we do not.

The proposed ordinance would require pregnancy support centers to post a disclaimer for services they do not provide. It is well-known that pregnancy support centers are exclusively focused on assisting women in their choice for childbirth, and do not provide abortions or contraception. To fine a center \$500 for not posting a sign that states as much is nothing short of harassment, especially when nothing in a pregnancy support center's yellow page advertisements or web pages would lead a woman to believe these centers provide abortions or abortion-related services.

The bill deserves criticism for being a blatant case of singling out nonprofits because of their specific mission: it only seeks to fine *pro-life centers* for not posting a list of services they do not provide. The bill does not on the other hand seek to fine abortion clinics for not posting a list of services they do not provide (e.g., parenting classes, maternity and infant clothes, formula). The bill seeks to regulate only one type of non-profit: those whose clients are pregnant women seeking help.

Pregnancy resource centers provide needed and welcome free services to pregnant women seeking assistance. They are regulated by all the laws which regulate charities. Evidence that pregnancy resource centers provide valuable services to the community comes in many forms, including their numerous partnerships with local government agencies, churches, and other community organizations that refer women in need *to* these centers. If pregnancy resource centers were not legitimate, caring non-profit organizations that provide emotional,

material and practical assistance to pregnant and parenting women, it's unlikely that any of these entities would refer clients to them.

The Archdiocese of Baltimore provides \$100,000 annually to pregnancy resource centers because we believe pregnant women seeking the assistance they provide should get it, and because we feel the help they provide these women will lead to safer pregnancies and healthier babies. This legislation threatens both of these goals.

In today's economy, it is difficult enough for pregnancy centers, which operate on a shoe-string budget, to serve the thousands of pregnant women who walk through their doors looking for help. We sincerely hope you will take our concerns to heart and reject Council Bill 09-0406.

In the Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edwin F. O'Brien".

+Edwin F. O'Brien  
Archbishop of Baltimore

cc: Baltimore City Council Members