

Judge Strikes Baltimore Law Targeting Pregnancy Centers

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A federal judge has struck down a Baltimore law that was the subject of [a lawsuit](#) brought by the Archdiocese of Baltimore because it unfairly attacks pregnancy centers that provide women with abortion alternatives.



A non-compliant pregnancy center may also be subject to a criminal misdemeanor charge under the law and, if convicted, the pregnancy center is subject to a fine of \$200, plus \$50 for each day the offense continues. The non-payment of fines could result in the pregnancy center being held in contempt of court.

Judge Garbis in Baltimore granted summary judgment finding the anti-pregnancy center law is viewpoint-based and impermissible to render constitution under the First Amendment. He dismissed without prejudice all other claims and found a couple of the plaintiffs lacked standing (including the Archbishop and the Catholic church that provides space for one of the pregnancy centers that filed suit) but the ruling is viewed as a substantial victory by pro-life advocates.

Garbis is expected to enter a permanent injunction on Monday against the law, which is similar to ones proposed in Washington state and New York City that pro-life advocates have been working overtime to oppose.

Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, the former city council president who is now the mayor, sponsored the measure that [the city council approved](#) on a 12-3 vote. The council defeated an amendment to the bill that would have required abortion businesses to post a similar sign confirming they do not provide abortion alternatives.

“Under the Ordinance, such an organization – referred to as a “limited-service pregnancy center” – must post a conspicuous sign in its waiting room notifying its clients that the center “does not provide or make referral for abortion or birth-control services,” the judge wrote. “As discussed herein, the Court holds that the Ordinance violates the Freedom of Speech Clause of Article I of the Constitution of the United States and is unenforceable.”

“Whether a provider of pregnancy-related services is “pro-life” or “prochoice,” it is for the provider – not the Government – to decide when and how to discuss abortion and birth-control methods. The Government cannot, consistent with the First Amendment, require a “pro-life” pregnancy-related service center to post a sign as would be required by the Ordinance,” Judge Garbis added.

Care Net, the national network of pregnancy centers, told LifeNews.com the ruling will send a message across the country that similar legislative efforts by abortion advocates to shut down pregnancy centers cannot be upheld.

“The decision is a victory for pregnancy centers who for years have encountered hostile legislation aimed at shutting them down,” said Care Net President Melinda Delahoyde. “A victory for pregnancy centers is a victory for women facing unplanned pregnancies, women who deserve life-affirming options and abortion alternatives.”

The ruling will likely be a boon to the efforts of those in New York City to stop a similar ordinance there.

Greg Pfundstein, the executive director of the Chiaroscuro Foundation, told LifeNews.com, “We are very encouraged that Judge Garbis has decided this effort to discredit life-affirming pregnancy centers violates the first amendment, and we hope this decision will stop NARAL’s insidious nationwide effort to stigmatize an entire class of service organizations as deceptive.”

“The New York City council has not yet passed the unwarranted Bill 371, and this ruling should make Speaker Quinn and Council Member Lappin think twice about doing so. Now more than ever women need alternatives to abortion,” he added.