

# Archdiocese, Pregnancy Center File Suit in Federal Court Over New City Ordinance

Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien, Archbishop of Baltimore, and representatives of the Greater Baltimore Center for Pregnancy Concerns, Inc. (GBCP), announced today the filing of a lawsuit today in U.S. District Court which states a new Baltimore City ordinance violates the pro-life pregnancy centers' first amendment rights by requiring the posting of a sign that says the centers do not provide or refer for abortions.

The suit names as defendants Baltimore's Mayor, City Council, City Health Commissioner and City Health Department.

The Ordinance "is a clear violation of these centers' constitutional rights to free speech and their free exercise of religion," Archbishop O'Brien said at a news conference held today at St. Brigid's Catholic Church, which hosts one of three centers operated by GBCP. "It is based on their moral and religious beliefs that these centers do not provide or refer for abortions."

The suit also accuses the City of viewpoint discrimination, since the ordinance applies only to pro-life pregnancy centers and not to facilities that provide abortion services. "The ordinance...targets for speech regulation only one side of a contentious public, political debate," the complaint reads. "The Supreme Court has repeatedly ruled that such viewpoint discrimination violates the First Amendment."

Finally, the lawsuit addresses the fact that the ordinance compels the centers to untruthfully state that they do not provide birth-control services. "In fact [the centers provide] birth-control services in the form of education about abstinence and natural family planning...medically recognized means of birth control," the complaint states.

The Center for Pregnancy Concerns provides free services to 1,000 pregnant women in Baltimore City annually, and handles approximately 8,000 calls to their 24-hour

hotline.

The Archbishop thanked the law firm of Gallagher Evelius and Jones for agreeing to litigate the case on a pro bono basis.

The Ordinance, which was passed by Baltimore City Council last November, went into effect in January of this year.