

# Arguments for pregnancy center bill seem ridiculous

If we thought things were bizarre before in the Baltimore City Council's effort to create a law targeting nonprofit, pro-life pregnancy resource centers, it went from the sublime to the ridiculous this week.

The regulation aims to require such centers - there are four of them in the city - to post signs saying the services they don't provide, such as abortions and contraceptive services.

As we pointed out a few weeks ago, that would be akin to requiring dentists' offices to post signs saying they don't provide appendectomies, or neurology offices to point out that they don't offer foot surgery. These services are not part of their mission, and there is no need to say so. Clients are aware these services are not offered.

Supporters of the City Council bill say "test patients" - Planned Parenthood interns posing as pregnant women - who visited the pro-life pregnancy resource centers were misled, or given misinformation. However, during the hearing on the bill, not one of the 50 people who testified was an actual patient who claimed to have been misled. The only actual patient who testified was one who had been advised by an abortion clinic to terminate her pregnancy, but after seeing an ultrasound at a pregnancy resource center, decided to give the child life. Her now-3-year-old son accompanied her to the hearing.

The bill has been watered down a bit since first introduced. Instead of a \$500 daily fine, the violation will cost \$150 a day, and a center will now have 10 days' notice to comply before the fines kick in on a civil rather than a criminal offense. Further attempts to amend the bill were unsuccessful. An amendment would have required abortion clinics also to post signs stating the services they do not provide.

City Council President Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, who sponsored the bill, voted against the amendment, of course. And, curiously, she told the council she opposed making abortion clinics post signs saying they perform abortions because it could open them up to violence. We're not sure we understand her line of thinking (if she

was thinking at all, and not just knee-jerk reacting). She did not at all acknowledge the fact that there have been instances of violence against pro-life centers as well as against abortion clinics; if one deserves protection, does not the other? Besides, the bill requires pregnancy resource centers to list the services they do not provide; the amendment was a parallel amendment, requiring abortion clinics to list services they also do not provide – in this case, adoption referrals, maternity services or postnatal support.

The amendment would not have required abortion clinics to list the services they provide, such as abortion. That's a moot point anyway, since Planned Parenthood and NARAL Maryland, the major supporters of the bill, and the National Abortion Federation already list all the clinics that provide abortion services and abortion referrals on their Web sites.

If Rawlings-Blake thinks making information about abortion locations available to the public is detrimental, she ought to talk to the people who convinced her to sponsor this legislation in the first place. It is disingenuous at best for Rawlings-Blake to refuse to extend the same rules to abortion clinics as she wants to impose on pregnancy resource centers, and to use faulty logic in doing so.

Now that the amendment was defeated 10-5 and the bill itself was passed on Second Reader by a margin of 12-3, it seems likely that it will take nothing short of a miracle to prevent its passage when it comes for a final vote after Thanksgiving.

On the other hand, miracles are what the pregnancy resource centers provide – the miracle of life for women and their children who think they might otherwise have no alternatives. Maybe one more miracle is not too much to ask for.

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