

Baltimore City to pay a portion of pro-life pregnancy center's legal fees

The City of Baltimore will pay \$1.1 million to cover some of the legal fees incurred by the Center for Pregnancy Concerns after the center won a protracted legal battle over a city law requiring pro-life pregnancy centers to post signs stating they do not provide or refer for abortions or contraceptives.

The ordinance, passed in 2009 by the Baltimore City Council on a 12-3 vote, would have imposed a \$150 daily fine on pregnancy centers that failed to post mandated signs – the first law of its kind in the nation.

Pro-life opponents of the law argued that it violated the First Amendment right to freedom of speech and unfairly targeted pro-life centers while not requiring abortion providers to indicate which services they do not provide.

“The Center for Pregnancy Concerns is both happy and relieved to have this behind us, after eight years of being in this fight,” said Carol Clews, executive director of the Center for Pregnancy Concerns, based in Essex.

Clews noted that the money will go to the attorneys, not the Center for Pregnancy Concerns.

“Those attorneys have worked hard for years on this case,” Clews said. “(They) are certainly deserving.”

The \$1.1 million payment will cover a portion of the legal fees accrued during the litigation. The law firms working on the case include Gallagher, Evelius & Jones, LLP and Ferguson, Schetelich & Ballew, P.A.

The Archdiocese of Baltimore filed a lawsuit in 2010 against the city on behalf of then-Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien (who campaigned against the ordinance); St. Brigid Catholic Church (an archdiocesan facility in which pregnancy center services

were offered); and the Center for Pregnancy Concerns.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Court upheld the pregnancy center's freedom of speech 3-0 in a Jan. 5 ruling. In June, the U.S. Supreme Court **refused a request** by the city to review the lower court's ruling. The Supreme Court also ruled in June that a similar California law was in violation of the First Amendment.

The Center for Pregnancy Concerns is a pro-life, private, non-profit agency that offers more than 1,200 pregnancy tests and counseling services annually, according to its website. Some of its services have been offered in archdiocesan facilities.

Emily Rosenthal and George P. Matysek Jr. contributed to this article.

Email Emily Rosenthal at erosenthal@CatholicReview.org