

Komen pink still tarnished by Planned Parenthood ties

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Susan G. Komen for the Cure is commemorating 20 years in Maryland this year, and its annual Hunt Valley Race for the Cure – planned for Oct. 21, in Breast Cancer Awareness Month – is now the state’s largest footrace, according to the breast cancer-fighting organization.

This year, its trademark pink has been colored by January’s funding tug-of-war with the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, the nation’s largest abortion provider.

In December 2011, Komen tightened its criteria for grant eligibility. Although Planned Parenthood affiliates were longtime grant recipients, they were ineligible under the new criteria, which aimed to directly fund services such as mammograms, and not organizations that only provided education or referrals with immeasurable outcomes, such as Planned Parenthood.

When Planned Parenthood learned of the new policy, its president Cecile Richards publicly accused Komen of “bullying” the organization, and similar attacks fueled a media firestorm. Within days, Komen rescinded its new granting criteria.

The controversy is outlined in “Planned Bullyhood,” a new book by Karen Handel, former Komen senior vice president of public policy. Handel resigned after some media outlets accused her of compelling Komen to discontinue Planned Parenthood grants.

A Catholic, pro-life advocate and 2010 Republican gubernatorial candidate in

Georgia, Handel describes her role in the criteria decision-making as auxiliary to Komen's central leadership, and focuses on Planned Parenthood as the true "bully" that pushed Komen to cave.

Planned Parenthood received about \$700,000 in fiscal year 2011 from 16 Komen affiliates - less than 1 percent of Komen's \$93 million annual community granting portfolio, and less than a tenth of 1 percent of the abortion-provider's \$1 billion annual budget.

Archdiocesan reaction

The debacle did not affect the Respect Life Office of the Archdiocese of Baltimore's position on Komen, created in January 2011.

The statement calls the organization's work "beneficial," but says that the Respect Life Office "neither supports nor encourages participation in activities that benefit Susan G. Komen for the Cure," citing Komen's "policy allowing affiliates to offer financial support to abortion-providing facilities, its public denial of studies showing abortion as a contributing cause of breast cancer and its endorsement of embryonic stem cell research."

Komen praised the "promise" of embryonic stem-cells in a 2006 newsletter. However, the organization stated in February 2012 that it has not funded embryonic stem-cell research.

Komen also says that studies showing a link between abortion and increased breast cancer risk do not meet its criteria for "comprehensive and well-designed research," a widely-held view.

However, of the 70 published studies examining the link, 55 showed a positive correlation between abortion and breast cancer. According to the Breast Cancer Prevention Institute in Somerville, N.J., none of the 15 studies showing a negative correlation were statistically significant.

In the past, some Catholic schools and parishes in the archdiocese have participated in Komen's fundraising efforts. Some Catholics have discontinued their association due to Komen's support of Planned Parenthood, said Sean Caine, archdiocesan

communications director.

The Respect Life Office expressed sympathy and concern for breast cancer victims and their families in its statement, and suggested the Breast Cancer Prevention Institute, as well as the Coalition on Abortion-Breast Cancer in Hoffman Estates, Ill., as alternatives to Komen.

It also supports the local work of St. Agnes Breast Cancer Center in Catonsville and the Hoffberger Breast Center at Mercy Medical Center in Baltimore.

Local funding

In Maryland, Planned Parenthood has never applied to receive funding from Komen Maryland, according to a January 2012 statement from Komen Maryland Executive director Robin Prothro.

Among the institutions Komen Maryland benefits is Mercy Medical Center, which received \$150,000 for the 2012-2013 year for breast cancer education and clinical trials.

After skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer among women, according to the American Cancer Society.

The American Cancer Society and the Avon Foundation also host fundraising events to fight breast cancer during October. Spokespeople for both organizations told the Catholic Review the organizations do not currently fund embryonic stem-cell research or Planned Parenthood. Neither acknowledges a link between abortion and breast cancer.