

Life: 365 days a year

This week, tens of thousands of pro-life activists, young and old, gathered in the nation's capital to tell Congress, the president and the Supreme Court that they will not give up on vital issues of abortion and health care.

The marchers certainly have much to say about the recent notice from the Obama administration that the requirement that all health plans cover contraceptives and sterilization free of charge will not include much of an exemption for religious organizations. That threat to religious liberty deserves attention. It makes no sense to require every health plan to include such coverage, since for the most part contraception and sterilization are not required for a woman's health - much less at no charge, while many preventative medications for the heart, for example, require high co-pays. Also, if the government is going to require such a policy, it is supremely unfair not to allow conscience exemptions for religious organizations.

The speeches on the National Mall always include rhetoric about governmental policy, but this year they help us remember life is a 365-day-a-year effort. The day-to-day issues are epitomized by the death of a baby girl earlier this month about only four and a half miles from where the marchers gathered on the Mall. The infant, wrapped loosely in a towel, was left on a doorstep in Northeast Washington. The baby, found by neighbors who alerted emergency personnel, was pronounced dead a few hours later.

When found, she was stiff, and bleeding from the nose and mouth. But it's possible this little baby could have had a chance at a normal life, because the District of Columbia, like every state in the Union, has a haven law for infants. Parents, and in some cases another adult designated by the parent, may leave a baby at a hospital or other location. The locations and number of days allowed vary in each jurisdiction, but Washington, D.C., is one of the most generous: a baby can be left within 14 days of birth at a hospital, fire station, police department or EMS unit. Here in Maryland, the law allows 10 days for a parent to leave the child at a hospital or other designated facility or with another responsible adult.

The haven laws illustrate the heart and soul of pro-life efforts. For a woman who is

so confused about having borne a new life, there is still hope. We are grateful she did not choose abortion, but instead of abandoning her child in a Dumpster or on a doorstep, or subjecting her child to abuse, she could have turned the newborn over to those who could find a family to welcome the child and provide a new life.

Those in the trenches of the pro-life movement do all of this and so much more every day of the year – from providing formula and diapers to helping pass legislation to allow the preservation of umbilical-cord blood to fighting against funding of embryonic stem-cell research in favor of funds for projects using adult stem cells.

Pro-life work does not happen just one day a year in January, when thousands gather in Washington and march along Constitution Avenue to the Supreme Court. It goes on every day, in myriad ways, because life itself goes on day after day.