

Pennsylvania approves plates

PHILADELPHIA - Pennsylvania has become the latest state to approve the use of a "Choose Life" specialty license plate.

The plates were approved last November and became available for purchase in January.

The cost per plate is \$40. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation receives \$20, and the other \$20 is an annual membership fee in Pennsylvania Choose Life.

Every year, when people renew their registration, they will receive a reminder from the pro-life organization to renew their annual \$20 membership.

Pennsylvania Choose Life will administer the funds it collects, using the money to support women in crisis pregnancies. Money collected in each county is to go to "crisis pregnancy centers located in those counties," said Mary Wurtz, the organization's administrator.

The other states with "Choose Life" plates are: Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Hawaii, Montana, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, South Dakota, Maryland and Connecticut. Plate approval is expected sometime this year in Georgia and Indiana.

In Pennsylvania the project began several years ago, but it stalled until the Legislature decided that the Department of Transportation would give the approval, not the Legislature.

"All we had to do was prove we were a charitable organization and provide information about what our homes do for women in crisis pregnancies," Wurtz told The Catholic Standard & Times, newspaper of the Philadelphia Archdiocese.

"In Florida, we sold 8,000 plates in our first five months," said Russell Amerling, national publicity coordinator of Choose Life Inc., in Ocala, Fla., where the idea for the plates originated.

"But we had a lawsuit and all kinds of publicity surrounding it," he said. "In

Pennsylvania, this has been such an easy process. There hasn't been much coverage in the mainstream media, so a lot of people don't know about it."

The success of the program depends on getting the word out that "Choose Life" plates are available.

In states such as Florida, where the plates have become popular, monthly revenues generated by the plate sales can be as high as \$65,000. In only two years, more than \$2.5 million has been raised for adoption services in that state.

In his 10 years of work helping states offer the plates, Mr. Amerling has seen groups that support keeping abortion legal initiate lawsuits to block their sale where a state's legislature has to approve the plates.

"If the plates are approved through an administrative process, the opposition doesn't sue, because their reason for suing is that a legislature approved a 'Choose Life' plate and not a pro-choice plate," he said.

Under an administrative process, "anybody can apply for this, so they have no grounds to sue," he said.

Mr. Amerling also has found that in states that offer both pro-life and "pro-choice" plates, sales of pro-life plates are far more successful.

"In Hawaii, where we have a 'Choose Life' plate," he said, "Planned Parenthood got a 'Respect Choice' plate, and we're outselling them 5-to-1. In Montana, we're outselling them 8-to-1."

The original idea for the plate came from Florida's Marion County Commissioner, Randy Harris, in 1996, as a way to raise money, awareness and support for women in crisis pregnancies who want to carry their babies to term rather than have an abortion but need financial help.