

Settlement reached for abortion protesters arrested in 2008

By Catholic Review Staff

The Maryland Board of Public Works, which includes Gov. Martin J. O'Malley as one of its three members, announced March 7 that it will grant a \$385,000 settlement with nine individuals who were illegally arrested and jailed by Maryland State Police on Aug. 1, 2008 after displaying graphic images of aborted babies along Route 24 in Bel Air.

This settlement must still be approved by the individual plaintiffs.

Nine of the 18 people arrested at the demonstration filed suit, along with DEFEND LIFE, a regional pro-life organization that organizes pro-life demonstrations known as the "Face the Truth Tour."

As part of the settlement, the Maryland State Police cannot restrict speech, including speech employing images of aborted human babies, based on reactions of viewers or motorists to that speech, according to a press March 7 press release from DEFEND LIFE.

The Maryland State Police must also agree to implement a training program within 120 days of settlement that will train its officials and employees on First and Fourth Amendment rights. The program must be reviewed by plaintiff's counsel before implementation.

According to DEFEND LIFE no reason was given for the arrests, phone calls were

denied, a lawyer was denied access and teenage girls were “bra-searched.”

On Aug. 12, 2008, all charges were dropped in Harford County District Court against the 18 persons who had been arrested. In 2011, after dismissing Bel Air from the lawsuit, U.S. District Judge Richard Bennett stated in a summary judgment that the Maryland State Police had violated the plaintiffs’ First Amendment free speech rights and their Fourth Amendment rights against unreasonable seizures.

He further stated that the sole purpose of a trial in this case would be to determine the amount of the judgments the plaintiffs would be awarded.