

State proposes tighter regulations on abortion clinics

The Maryland Catholic Conference is heartened by the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's publication of proposed tighter regulations on abortion clinics.

The proposals, which were published Dec. 2 and could be enacted as early as March 2012, would license abortion clinics and require them to follow regulations similar to the ones governing outpatient ambulatory surgical centers.

"Regulating abortion clinics is important," said Nancy Paltell, associate director of Respect for Life for the MCC. "Even if we're not successful in saving the baby's life, we can at least work to save the mother's life."

"The maternal deaths and egregious injuries that are happening in Maryland abortion clinics have got to stop, and requiring abortion clinics to follow common-sense health and safety regulations will prevent many of the types of injuries that have been occurring."

After being contacted by the MCC, Stephanie White testified before a Maryland Senate committee last March 2 about her daughter, Denise Crowe. As The Catholic Review reported then, Crowe died in 2006 after receiving too much anesthesia while undergoing an abortion in Severna Park.

That testimony came on the heels of an August 2010 case in which a woman suffered injuries to her uterus and small intestine while undergoing an abortion in Elkton by a New Jersey doctor attempting to avoid laws in that state.

White's testimony came during deliberations on a Senate bill that would have required abortion clinics be regulated not as doctor's offices, as is currently the case, but as ambulatory surgical centers.

That would require abortion clinics to have anesthetics be administered by a qualified doctor or nurse anesthetist and have emergency equipment and

procedures in place if a patient needs to be resuscitated or transported to a hospital.

While that bill did not pass, Paltell considered the process an important step toward the proposed new regulations.

“We were the lead lobbying organization on legislation to regulate abortion clinics as ambulatory surgical facilities,” she said. “While the bill did not pass, the committee chairmen were promised by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene that they would draft regulations to protect the health and safety of women having abortion surgery.”

According to a news release from DHMH, under the proposed new regulations, “To obtain a license, surgical abortion clinics will have to meet specific requirements related to such matters as anesthesia services, emergency services, laboratory and radiologic services. These requirements are adapted from regulations governing ambulatory surgical centers.”

The regulations have been submitted to the Administrative, Executive and Legislative Review, a joint committee of the Maryland General Assembly consisting to 10 senators and 10 members of the House of Delegates.

“A member of our staff will provide a legal analysis to the committee,” said Marie H. Razulis, counsel in the Department of Legislative Services. “The committee has 45 days to review and decide whether to make the final adoption of the regulations. It could make minor changes, they can put them on hold.

“The end of March is the earliest they could be enacted.”

The proposed regulations can be found at tinyurl.com/abortion-regs.