

Statement on Council Bill 09-0406, “Limited-Service Pregnancy Centers Disclaimers’

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I offer this statement **in opposition to Council Bill 09-0406**, which would fine pregnancy resource centers in Baltimore City \$500 a day for failing to post a list of services they do not provide.

Let’s be clear first about what these centers *do* provide, namely, needed and welcome services, free of charge, to your constituents who are struggling to find help in carrying a pregnancy to term. These centers partner with and accept referrals from city and state agencies, because they provide services and materials that few others in the City provide. The centers work with communities and congregations of all denominations throughout the city, serving hundreds of women who have nowhere else to turn. They provide material and emotional support throughout pregnancy, and offer parenting skills, formula and diapers to new mothers when money is tight and they’re running low.

There is also no doubt about what these centers do *not* provide, namely abortion or comprehensive birth control services. The legislation before you would require these centers to disclose this fact, and penalize them for not doing so.

On the surface, it may seem there should be little reason for objecting to this legislation. If it is clear what these centers do and do not provide, why should they object to this legislation? Perhaps some of you, and many other members of the City Council, agreed to co-sponsor this legislation on this presumption.

Any yet we do object, vigorously.

Having faced a similar statewide effort two years ago which also targeted pregnancy resource centers, we know full well that this legislation is intended to single out these centers precisely because of their mission. These centers exist to give support,

and yes, encouragement, to women facing a crisis pregnancy, in the hope they will choose to bring their child to term.

Sadly, in the minds of some, this is a mission worth hindering. One may reasonably wonder how such an act seeks the common ground that many have called for in our country's debate between those who are pro-life or pro-choice.

As City Council members, you know all too well how deeply scarred our families, our neighborhoods, and our city streets are by a loss of hope, and a lack of respect for the gift of life. In the midst of these challenges, the pregnancy resource centers targeted by this legislation offer a glimpse of hope to women who understandably may feel there is no point in bringing a child into the world. It is deplorable to suggest that their good work, simply *because* it openly serves a pro-life mission, warrants the type of harassment fostered by this legislation.

We cannot stand by when charitable agencies dedicated to welcoming new life in our city are singled out because they do not, as a matter of conscience cannot, participate in the work of others who would prevent that life. It is for this reason that the legislation demands our vocal and unrelenting opposition. The Archdiocese of Baltimore has worked tirelessly with you and all others of good will to bring hope where there is great despair, through our churches, our hospitals, our Catholic Charities, and our schools. We applaud the efforts of all those who share in that service, and whose outreach speaks to a belief that there is always reason to welcome a new life into our midst.

Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict the XVI, reminded us in his recent encyclical *Caritas in Veritate - Love in Truth* - that "openness to life is at the center of true development." "If personal and social sensitivity towards the acceptance of a new life is lost," he cautioned, "other forms of acceptance that are valuable for society also wither away."

I urge you to turn your attention and your worthy service as council members to the urgent needs of our City, and to put to rest once and for all the distraction that this legislation has needlessly placed before you. And as you do so, we continue to pledge our commitment to partnering with you in improving the lives of all residents of Baltimore City, and to building hope for the lives of those who will inherit the

fruits of our labor.