

ST. LOUIS VICTORY

In January 2017, when a bill was introduced in St. Louis to expand abortion rights, the Catholic League supported St. Louis Archbishop Robert Carlson in his effort to stop the bill. We lost that round but won in court in October.

The bill added “pregnancy and reproductive health decisions as protected classes” to an existing anti-discrimination ordinance. It meant that Catholic non-profits, such as schools and social service agencies, could be fined for maintaining their opposition to abortion in matters of employment and insurance coverage.

Archbishop Carlson feared that the bill could turn St. Louis into “a sanctuary city for abortion.” His fears were not without merit. As soon as the law passed, Catholic institutions were attacked, triggering a lawsuit.

On January 12, 2017, Bill Donohue wrote to Lewis Reed, the president of the Board of Aldermen in St. Louis, stating that the government “has no constitutional right to encroach on the religious liberties of Catholic institutions, or those of any other religion.”

A federal judge ruled on October 4 that by not allowing for a religious exemption, the St. Louis ordinance violated the U.S. Constitution and Missouri law. Judge Audrey Fleissig said the law violated the First Amendment rights of Catholic schools by requiring them to employ or house people who are pro-abortion.

The judge’s ruling does not apply to secular institutions. But it is a victory for Catholics and people of all faiths. We salute Archbishop Carlson for his courage.