

Abel, Pamela

From: rabbibonnie@charter.net
Sent: Monday, February 10, 2014 12:55 PM
To: Hardiman, Emily; Abel, Pamela
Cc: Subeck, Lisa
Subject: Madison ordinance to protect patient access to health clinics
Attachments: Madison FACE ordinance.docx

February 10, 2014

To the Public Safety Review Committee and the Board of Health,

As Chair of the Wisconsin Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, I commend Ald. Lisa Subeck for her proposal to protect access to reproductive health clinics. Clinic staff and patients have the right to enter the clinic without facing harassment and intimidation from anti-choice protesters. Protecting access to a clinic in no way interferes with protesters' rights of free speech. They are able to speak, to sing, to pray, to hold signs. But free speech does not include the right to interfere with another person's right to access legal health care.

Anti-choice protestors will tell you they are not harassing women, but providing 'counseling'. This is a misrepresentation of their actions and a gross misuse of the term 'counseling'. It is highly unlikely that these people have any education, training, or licensure to provide any kind of counseling. No genuine counselor would approach someone in a public space and offer unsolicited 'counseling', nor would a genuine counselor try to persuade or influence someone toward or against a particular action.

For twelve years, I worked as Director of Clergy Programming at the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) in Washington DC. In that capacity, I created a national program to train clergy to offer unbiased, all-options pastoral counseling to women seeking help making a decision about an unplanned or crisis pregnancy. We only trained ordained clergy and seminary students who had received clinical pastoral education in their seminary training. We trained them to offer only unbiased, medically accurate information and to help women explore their own consciences, religious beliefs, and life situations. Throughout the training, we stressed the importance of the clergy not imposing their own viewpoints upon the women they worked with. The women who were counseled came to our clergy through referrals from clinic staff or from our national office. At no point did we ever suggest to our clergy that they go to a clinic and impose unwanted and unsolicited advice to women trying to access health care. This is a far cry from the type of 'counseling' anti-choice protestors impose on women.

In 2001, RCRC sent trained clergy and national staff members to Wichita, Kansas, to provide a Peaceful Presence to counter Operation Save America's protests in front of Dr. George Tiller's reproductive health clinic. Our clergy and staff witnessed, and themselves were the target of, shouting, harassment, invective, and even physical violence from the anti-choice protestors. Wichita had no ordinance to protect clinic workers and patients, even though in 1993 Dr. Tiller had been shot in both arms by a protestor at his clinic. In 2009, Dr. Tiller was shot to death in the foyer of his church by an anti-choice activist.

Ald. Subeck's proposed ordinance is sensible, measured, and unbiased. It allows reasonable accommodation for peaceful, non-violent protests and protects protestors' rights of free speech. It applies equally to all protestors, whether they be pro-choice or anti-choice or protesting on some other issue entirely. Its purpose is not to stifle speech, but to protect the right of clinic staff and patients to enter a health care facility free of harassment, intimidation, or coercion.

On behalf of the pro-choice religious community of Madison, the Wisconsin Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice supports and applauds this proposed ordinance and looks forward to its passage.

Faithfully,

Rabbi Bonnie Margulis

Chair

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