

Ann Brandt

LD 1899 "An Act To Ensure Safe Entry and Access for People Seeking Health Care and Other Constitutional Rights"

Senator Carney, Representative Harnett, and members of the Judiciary Committee, I'm writing in support of LD 1899, An Act To Ensure Safe Entry and Access for People Seeking Health Care and Other Constitutional Rights.

I have been a Volunteer Greeter at the Portland Planned Parenthood health center since 2018. We wear vests identifying ourselves as volunteers for Planned Parenthood, stand outside the entrance of the clinic, and open the doors for those entering the building. We also stand at the corner, and if a patient requests it, we escort them past the protesters from the corner to the entrance.

In the last few years I have witnessed many incidents of harassment and intimidation by protesters of patients and others entering the building, including the following:

- Protesters standing on either side of the sidewalk leading up to entrance (so that people going toward the building entrance must walk a gauntlet between them), holding large signs showing bloody fetuses, and yelling "Don't murder your baby" at any women going towards the building entrance. This happens every week.

- Protesters standing next to the entrance, and on the sidewalk directly in front of the entrance and yelling at the top of their lungs that abortion is murder, that god hates murderers, and that there is no forgiveness for those who commit abortion, and that those entering the building are going to hell. They are so loud that the Planned Parenthood Volunteers standing at the entrance have to wear earplugs because the noise is physically painful. Again, this happens every week.

- Arguing with women who tell them (the protesters) they are just there to get a pap smear or other test, saying to those patients they are complicit in murder because they are supporting Planned Parenthood by using their services.

- When passersby thank volunteers for being there or tell the protesters that they should not harass women coming there for healthcare, protesters will actually follow them down the street screaming at them that they are just as guilty as the murderers inside because they support abortion. This happens every week. This creates a chaotic and frightening environment for patients coming toward the building.

- During the pandemic, the protesters have not worn masks or socially distanced, and they are yelling, so again, this is frightening to those seeking healthcare who have to walk through and past them to get into the building.

- One "preacher" yelled that if Planned Parenthood and those getting abortions were willing to commit murder, then it was morally right to kill them in order to protect the innocent babies.

- Another time, another of the "preachers" preached about how his group was like abolitionists who were fighting to protect the lives of slaves in the 1800's, and that it was moral for them to commit violence in the Civil War to save the slaves, and he then went on to say, that those who were there protesting the murder of babies inside were like the abolitionists, and he felt "violent" toward those who were murdering babies today. Again, pretty frightening to hear for patients and staff associated with Planned Parenthood.

- Recently, one of the "preachers" (those who stand closest to the door and yell the loudest) has started filming and live-streaming himself by setting up his phone directly across from the door where he is standing. This of course has the effect of also filming and broadcasting the faces of those going into and out of the Planned Parenthood building. This is an invasion of privacy at the very least, as well as an act of intimidation.

I have seen many patients start to cry as they walk through the protesters to try to get into the building. Those who don't have a support person with them will often ask Planned Parenthood volunteers to escort them. Sometimes even those who have a support person with them will ask for Planned Parenthood volunteers to walk on either side of them as they approach the building.

People should be able to access healthcare without being berated by strangers, having their privacy violated, or having their lives threatened. I hope that LD 1899 can improve the situation for patients trying to access healthcare at Planned Parenthood and other clinics in Maine that provide reproductive healthcare.

Thank you for reading this, and for considering ways to improve the experience of patients trying to access reproductive healthcare in Maine.