



## WLP Files Brief in Harrisburg Buffer Zone Case

*The rise in anti-abortion violence and recent invasions of Pennsylvania facilities underscores the need to protect patients, staff, and clinic escorts*

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**PENNSYLVANIA** – Amid a stark rise in anti-abortion harassment and violence across the country and specific targeting of Pennsylvania facilities, Women's Law Project attorneys filed [an amicus curiae](#) brief to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit on behalf of Physicians for Reproductive Health and Pittsburgh Pro-Choice Escorts in *Reilly v. City of Harrisburg*, a case that will inform the future of the City of Harrisburg's statutory buffer zone.

The city of Harrisburg's statutory buffer zone was [established in 2012](#) to protect providers and patients in the wake of a campaign of harassment that included anti-abortion activists pounding on clinic windows, following clinic staff, trespassing, and photographing patients against their will.

*Amici* urge the Court to uphold the Harrisburg buffer zone ordinance.

This litigation started in 2016 when a group of anti-abortion protestors sued the City of Harrisburg, arguing that the buffer zone ordinance was unconstitutional on its face and as applied to their particular form of protest, euphemistically dubbed "sidewalk counseling." The case is now before the Third Circuit on appeal after a lower court ruled denying the protestors' motion for summary judgment and granting the City's motion for summary judgment, thereby upholding the buffer zone ordinance.

"Recent incidents of anti-abortion harassment and violence in Pennsylvania and the overall rise in anti-abortion harassment and violence underscore the necessity of the Harrisburg buffer zone to protect the physical safety of patients, staff, and clinic escorts and access to reproductive healthcare," says WLP staff attorney Maggie Neely, who authored the brief with Hannah Brem and Namita Dwarakanath. "Reasonable buffer zones reduce the risk of violent encounters, disruption of healthcare services, and fear of being targeted with violence simply for seeking or providing healthcare."

Over the past forty-five years, the National Abortion Federation (NAF) has [documented](#) more than one million acts of anti-abortion violence, harassment, and disruption, including 11 murders, 26 attempted murders, 42 bombings, 196 arsons, 491 incidents of assault and battery, and 1,064 blockades.

As U.S. government officials warned, anti-abortion harassment and violence escalated in anticipation of and following the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that reversed *Roe v. Wade*. Clinic invasions, vandalism, stalking, hoax devices or suspicious packages, bomb threats, and burglary incidents have escalated in frequency, with a particularly drastic increase in blockades and physical assault of patients, clinic escorts, and staff.

Anti-abortion extremists are actively targeting reproductive healthcare facilities in Pennsylvania.

Earlier this year, a defendant was indicted for a FACE Act violation after he assaulted a clinic escort in Philadelphia ["twice on the same date, with one assault resulting in bodily injury."](#)

"Red Rose Rescue," a group that invades and terrorizes clinics intending to obstruct patients from obtaining abortion care, recently invaded two Pennsylvania clinics. During one invasion, a member of the group barricaded himself inside the clinic's bathroom, forcing clinic staff to call the police, evacuate the building, and cancel all appointments for the day —effectively terrorizing patients and achieving a complete disruption in patient care.

Of further concern is the increasing overlap between anti-abortion extremists and anti-government extremists. Expert analyses have identified anti-government militias as the "greatest" and "most lethal" domestic terror threat in the United States amid a stark [rise in armed demonstrators attending abortion-related protests.](#)

Under such acute threat, Harrisburg's buffer zone ordinance remains essential to keep one of only two remaining healthcare facilities providing abortion care in central Pennsylvania open, and patients, staff, and escorts safe from anti-abortion harassment and violence.

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