



# Women's Law Project

## **WLP Statement on DOJ Lawsuit Filed Against Pennsylvania Anti-Abortion Activist for Alleged Actions in Clinic Invasion in Philadelphia**

*The U.S. Department of Justice Alleges Matthew Connolly violated the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act by invading a reproductive health medical facility that provides abortion care and barricading himself inside*

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**PENNSYLVANIA // August 28, 2024:** This week, the U.S. Department of Justice filed a civil lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania against a man for violating [the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances \(FACE\) Act](#). The FACE Act is a federal statute that prohibits the use of force, threats of force, or physical obstruction against anyone for seeking or providing reproductive health services. It also protects the exercise of the First Amendment right of religious freedom at places of religious worship.

Per a U.S. Department of Justice [statement](#), the lawsuit alleges that Pennsylvania-based anti-abortion activist Matthew Connolly violated the FACE Act when he entered Planned Parenthood's Elizabeth Blackwell Health Center in Philadelphia and then barricaded himself inside one of the clinic's bathrooms on Aug. 27, 2021. Per the lawsuit, Connolly's actions forced the clinic to shut down for the day, causing at least 44 appointments to be postponed.

The complaint seeks monetary penalties and injunctive relief as provided by the FACE Act.

"The anti-abortion movement has a troubling history of harassment and violence in Pennsylvania, so clinic and patient safety has long been a top concern," said WLP Co-Executive Director Susan J. Frietsche. "Can you imagine how terrifying it would be to be waiting for your appointment in your doctor's office when a protester invades the building and barricades himself inside? It's horrifying. Enough is enough. We are grateful the authorities are taking this incident seriously."

“Our patient and provider protection work includes litigation and policy advocacy, including continuously defending Pennsylvania’s two statutory buffer zones from legal attempts to dismantle them,” said Senior Staff Attorney Christine Castro. “Unfortunately, we also have to advocate against an anti-abortion Congressional effort to [eliminate the FACE Act](#), bipartisan legislation signed into law in 1994 after a shocking blitz of anti-abortion violence and harassment in early 1992 and the assassination of Dr. David Gunn in 1993.”

A 2022 National Abortion Federation [report](#) on violence and disruption at abortion care facilities revealed significant increases in major incidents like arson, burglaries, death threats, and invasions overall, with a sharp rise in violence and disruption in states that are protective of abortion rights. Clinic invasions rose by 25 percent.

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