

The Public Affairs Pulse

Keeping You on Top of Legislative & Advocacy Issues

US Supreme Court Hears Case Challenging Buffer Zones

WASHINGTON – On January 15, the US Supreme Court heard arguments in the case of *McCullen v Coakley*. This case directly challenges the Buffer Zone Law enacted in Massachusetts that prevent protestors outside of abortion clinics from passing within 35 feet of clinic entrances. The law was finally passed in 2007 after years of attempts after the 1994 clinic shootings in Boston and Brookline, Mass which killed two people and wounded five others. Anti-choice protestors are claiming that the law violates their First Amendment Right to free speech. Buffer Zone Laws are part of a larger network of laws known as FACE laws. FACE, standing for Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances, are laws that have been enacted around the country to protect patient privacy and safety from anti-choice protestors looking to do so-called “sidewalk counseling.” “Sidewalk counseling” involves talking to women entering abortion clinics and can range from offering prayers and pamphlets to name calling and even violence.

The Supreme Court Justices seemed divided on the issue with Chief Justice John Roberts, likely the deciding vote on the case, remaining silent. A final decision is pending.

US House Passes “No Taxpayer Funding For Abortion” Act

WASHINGTON – On January 28, the US House of Representatives voted on the deceptively named “No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act” (H.R. 7), legislation sponsored by Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ) that would restrict insurance coverage for abortion. The measure passed by a vote of 227-188, but stands almost no chance of being taken up in the Senate and faces a veto threat from the White House.

Over 40 Members spoke against the bill on the House floor, and all 53 House freshmen Democrats voted against its final passage. The Pro-Choice Caucus hosted a press conference reiterating their opposition to H.R. 7, condemning its passage, and calling on House leadership to focus on job creation, raising the minimum wage, and the other priorities that the President laid out in his State of the Union address.

Supporters of H.R. 7 claimed that the bill merely codified existing policy and was necessary to help ensure no federal funds go toward abortion in the new health insurance Marketplace created by the Affordable Care Act. Opponents of the bill rejected these claims, arguing that H.R. 7 goes far beyond existing policy and would ultimately lead to the elimination of private health insurance coverage of abortion.

Planned Parenthood Hosts Viewing of “After Tiller” to Celebrate Roe v Wade

Throughout January, Planned Parenthood Affiliates of Michigan (PPAM) hosted screenings of the new documentary “After Tiller,” to celebrate the 41st anniversary of *Roe v Wade*, the landmark US Supreme Court decision that legalized safe abortion for women.

On January 29th, PPAM partnered with Planned Parenthood of West and Northern Michigan (PPWNM), the Grand Rapids chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOWGR), and the Fountain Street Church Choice Fund to host a viewing of the film at Fountain Street Church.

The event featured a presentation on a Brief History of Choice prior to the film. The film highlights the life of late term abortion providers in the years since the assassination of Dr. George Tiller in Kansas in May of 2009. Dr. Tiller was shot at his church while serving as an usher at Sunday service. After the film, Planned Parenthood staff facilitated a discussion about the movie as well as about the larger issues facing those fighting for abortion rights for women today.

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