

2015 Smear Campaign Against Planned Parenthood



A coordinated effort by anti-abortion extremists failed to block patients' access to care at Planned Parenthood health centers.

Beginning in July 2015, an anti-abortion group called the Center for Medical Progress (CMP) leveled a series of elaborate and false claims against Planned Parenthood. Using multiple manipulated and illegally recorded videos, these extremists made what are now widely discredited and debunked accusations about practices to facilitate the donation of fetal tissue for use in medical research at a small number of Planned Parenthood health centers.

The campaign was yet another example of people opposed to safe and legal abortion seeking to prevent patients from accessing care at Planned Parenthood health centers, as well as pass legislation that would significantly curtail people's access to reproductive and sexual health care.

Planned Parenthood has never and would never sell fetal tissue. These anti-abortion operatives engaged in a deliberate fraud to deceive the public, and it has been shown over and over again that their claims are false.

Facts about Tissue Donation and Planned Parenthood

- Fetal tissue donation for medical research has led to lifesaving scientific breakthroughs, and this research has long had bipartisan support.
- Congress [passed](#) the National Institutes of Health Revitalization Act of 1993 with overwhelming support from the House (290-130) and Senate (93-4). Academic institutions and teaching hospitals across the country have received federal or private grants to support research using donated fetal tissue on a wide range of conditions including diabetes, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, spinal cord injuries, hemophilia, leukemia, sickle cell anemia, ALS, and others.
- No Planned Parenthood affiliate is currently facilitating patients' decisions to donate fetal tissue for use in medical research. In the past, affiliates have done this because it can improve public health and because their patients have requested it.
- Planned Parenthood has had clear guidance in place for more than a decade to ensure that this work, like every other service Planned Parenthood provides, follows high ethical and medical standards and complies with all laws. Planned Parenthood's guidance in this area goes above and beyond the legal requirements.
- In October 2015, Planned Parenthood [changed our policy](#) on fetal tissue donation to further counter CMP's discredited smear campaign. The health centers that participate in fetal tissue donation now accept no reimbursement for expenses related to tissue donation, even though accepting such reimbursements is legal, and instead [cover all expenses related to donation](#). Planned Parenthood does not and has never had any financial interest in fetal tissue donation.



Outcome of Investigations into Planned Parenthood

Following the release of CMP's heavily and misleadingly edited videos, investigations in at least 13 states concluded that Planned Parenthood engaged in no wrongdoing.

Eight other states declined to investigate at all, citing lack of evidence. What's more, none of the multiple, heavily partisan [congressional investigations](#) – including a select panel created for that sole purpose – concluded that Planned Parenthood violated any laws.

- House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Chairman Jason Chaffetz (R-UT), whose committee conducted one of these investigations, stated that he [uncovered no wrongdoing](#) after examining tens of thousands of pages of material provided by Planned Parenthood to his committee.
- Sen. Patty Murray [introduced a resolution](#) in the U.S. Senate calling to disband another Republican-led panel created to investigate Planned Parenthood, the Select Investigative Panel of the Committee on Energy and Commerce of the House of Representatives, as it had “found no wrongdoing on the part of Planned Parenthood.”
- Months later, ranking Democratic members of the House Judiciary Committee and House Oversight and Government Reform Committee [sent a letter](#) to their respective committee leaders in support of Planned Parenthood, requesting that they suspend investigation for lack of merit.

Federal Rulings Centered on the False Claims

Courts in several states also found no evidence of criminal wrongdoing by Planned Parenthood, instead concluding that the campaign was a fraud maliciously crafted by the CMP operatives.

- **In Texas**, a U.S. district court judge [wrote in his order](#) that the Inspector General of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission didn't have “even a scintilla of evidence” to warrant the termination of Planned Parenthood health centers from the Medicaid program because he was relying on “unauthenticated” video from CMP. He also characterized their video evidence as “suspect.”
- **A U.S. district court judge in Louisiana** blocked the governor's attempt to defund Planned Parenthood health centers in the state during the smear campaign, [writing](#) “the uncontradicted evidence in the record at this time is that PPGC [Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast] does not perform abortions in Louisiana, is not involved in the sale of fetal tissue and none of the conduct in question occurred at the PPGC's two Louisiana facilities.”
- **A U.S. district court judge in California** prohibited one of the operatives, David Daleiden, and a number of other anti-abortion extremists from releasing recordings and materials they illegally obtained, [writing](#) that the “defendants engaged in repeated instances of fraud, including the manufacture of fake documents, the creation and registration with the state of California of a fake company, and repeated false statements.”
- **The instigators of the manipulated videos were charged with felonies** in both California and Texas. In January 2016, a Texas grand jury issued both [felony and misdemeanor criminal charges](#) for two of the people behind the videos, David Daleiden and Sandra Merritt.

The pair are currently awaiting trial on multiple felony charges in California for actions leading up to the smear campaign.

Planned Parenthood Fights Back

Throughout CMP's malicious campaign, Planned Parenthood health centers continued to provide high-quality, compassionate health care and education. Planned Parenthood health centers received immense support from hundreds of grassroots organizations following the attacks, along with 2.4 million signatures from people showing their support for the organization. An [NBC/Wall Street Journal survey](#) indicated that support for Planned Parenthood, which was already high, actually [increased](#) at the time, and over 4 million new supporters joined Planned Parenthood after the attacks began in 2015. Today, Planned Parenthood has 16 million supporters.

In January 2016, Planned Parenthood sued the Center for Medical Progress for breaking multiple state and federal laws. That case went to trial and in November 2019, a jury empaneled by a federal district court in San Francisco found that the Center for Medical Progress, David Daleiden, and others who manufactured the discredited campaign against Planned Parenthood all broke multiple state and federal laws in their efforts to bar access to reproductive health care. The [jury ruled in Planned Parenthood's favor](#) on each of its claims, including finding that the defendants violated the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) and engaged in fraud, trespass, breach of contract, and illegal secret recording. The jury awarded Planned Parenthood both compensatory and punitive damages, totaling more than \$2 million, for the injuries that Daleiden and his co-conspirators caused.

The trial court made clear that the only people who engaged in wrongdoing were those behind the smear campaign:

- “Simply claiming the mantel [sic] of a journalist does not give someone a license to trespass, illegally record, or otherwise commit violations of generally applicable laws. The ‘evidence’ defendants actually gathered and then published as a result of the conduct the jury found was illegal did not itself show any illegal conduct by Planned Parenthood or plaintiff affiliates.”
- “[T]here is no evidence that any Federal government entity has concluded that any Planned Parenthood affiliate illegally profited from the sale of fetal tissue or altered procedures in violation of federal laws.”
- “[T]here was no evidence submitted at summary judgment or in pre-trial motions to show that any Planned Parenthood affiliate violated any law.”

Read More:

- [Read about Planned Parenthood services and the communities we serve](#)
- [Read about the essential role Planned Parenthood plays in providing care across the country](#)
- [Read about Planned Parenthood's services in its annual report and its audited financial statement and IRS 990 forms](#)
- [Read about the history of political attacks on Planned Parenthood, including decades of doctored videos, failed entrapments, and false accusations](#)

Additional Resources by Date

- [1988 Commission Report on fetal tissue donation](#) (12/14/1988)
- [Letter from Janet Heinrich, director, health care - public health issues, at the Government Accountability Office to the Senate Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education on the use of fetal tissue in research](#) (10/4/2000)

- [Letter from Roger Evans, Planned Parenthood's senior counsel, to Congress regarding history of harassment and attacks by anti-abortion opponents \(7/20/2015\)](#)
- [Letter from Roger Evans, Planned Parenthood's Senior Counsel, to Congress regarding the second heavily edited and misleading video released by anti-abortion opponents \(7/21/2015\)](#)
- [Letter from Cecile Richards, president of Planned Parenthood, to Dr. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health \(NIH\), urging an assessment of fetal tissue research to be led by medical experts \(7/27/2015\)](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions on Fetal Tissue Research from the Congressional Research Service \(7/31/2015\)](#)
- [Associated Press article about current studies using fetal tissue for scientific research \(8/11/2015\)](#)
- [Letter from Jim Esquea, assistant secretary for legislation at the Department of Health and Human Services, to Senators Joni Ernst and Roy Blunt explaining current legislation and federal funding for fetal tissue research \(8/14/2015\)](#)
- [Report from forensic experts finding that the CMP videos were heavily edited and do not reflect actual events, which Planned Parenthood submitted to congressional leadership \(8/25/2015\)](#)
- [Letter from Cecile Richards to congressional leadership, in which she provides extensive information and context about fetal tissue donation \(8/27/2015\)](#)
- [Short fact sheet on deceptive edits in the videos, including examples of splicing statements to fabricate quotes \(August 2015\)](#)
- [Democrats request Congressional committees suspend their "one-sided" investigations into Planned Parenthood \(9/3/2015\)](#)
- [Commentary about research using fetal tissue by Alta Charo, J.D., a leading bioethicist, published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* \(9/3/2015\)](#)
- [Report prepared in 2015 by the Congressional Budget Office \(CBO\) estimating that as many as 650,000 people could face reduced access to preventive health care if Congress were to succeed in blocking Medicaid patients from seeking care at Planned Parenthood health centers \(9/16/2015\)](#)
- [Letter from Keith Hall, director of CBO, to Representative Kevin McCarthy, Majority Leader of the U.S. House of Representatives, projecting the net cost to taxpayers of barring Planned Parenthood from Medicaid would be \\$130 million over 10 years because of an increase in unintended pregnancies without the high-quality contraceptive care Planned Parenthood provides \(9/22/2015\)](#)
- [Cecile Richards' written testimony before the House Government Oversight and Reform Committee \(9/29/2015\)](#)
- [Letter from Cecile Richards to Dr. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health \(NIH\), announcing the handful of Planned Parenthood health centers involved in fetal tissue research will no longer accept reimbursement in order to take away any basis for attacking Planned Parenthood in this area \(10/13/2015\)](#)
- [Open letter signed by 41 leading scientists who conduct research using fetal tissue offering support for the patients, physicians, and researchers who contribute to this vital work \(10/14/2015\)](#)
- [Commentary by Planned Parenthood's Chief Medical Officer in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, arguing that the smear campaign is a political effort to ban abortion in the U.S. \(10/14/2015\)](#)
- [Letter from Cecile Richards to House Speaker Paul Ryan asking for justification of further congressional investigations \(10/30/2015\)](#)
- [Open letter signed by over 50 of the nation's leading research institutions expressing grave concerns over attempts to restrict fetal tissue research \(11/3/2015\)](#)
- [Read about the vast majority of Americans who support Planned Parenthood \(December 2015\)](#)
- [U.S. District Court Order Resolving Unfair Competition Claim and Entering Judgment \(April 2020\)](#)
- [U.S. District Court Order on Post-Trial Motions \(August 2020\)](#)