

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 1, 2017

U.S. Department of Justice  
Attorney General Jeff Sessions  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Sessions,

Abortion clinics and health care providers who provide abortions, a legally protected medical procedure, are often the targets of violence and harassment. Following the release of highly edited videos aimed at discrediting abortion providers, clinics and patients have seen an increase in violence that threatens both providers and patients. As a result, we ask that as Attorney General, you direct the Department of Justice (DOJ) to enforce existing criminal statutes and aggressively pursue violations of the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act (FACE Act) and other laws that protect abortion providers and their patients.

During your confirmation, when asked about violence against abortion providers and their patients, you stated emphatically, “I disavow any activity like that. Absolutely. To even suggest that is unacceptable and I will enforce the laws that make clear that a person who wants to receive a lawful abortion cannot be blocked by protestors and disruption of a doctor’s practice. I might not favor that. I am pro-life, as you know. But we’ve settled on some laws that are clearly effective and as Attorney General you can be sure we would follow them.” When pressed on enforcement of the FACE Act specifically, you responded, “I would use the appropriate federal agencies and I do believe it is in violation of the law to excessively or improperly hinder, even, the access to an abortion clinic.” I am glad you recognize that as the nation’s top law enforcement official, you are responsible for enforcing all of our nation’s laws, and not just those you agree with personally.

As you know, in 1994, Congress passed the bipartisan Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act<sup>1</sup> in response to a period of escalating violence, harassment, and threats against abortion providers that culminated in the murder of Dr. David Gunn. Unfortunately, we are once again seeing a spike in violence, harassment, and threats against women’s health providers, with 2015 being the most violent year for abortion providers in recent memory.<sup>2</sup> In November of 2015, three people – a police officer and pastor, an Iraq war veteran, and a mother of two – were murdered at a Planned Parenthood facility in Colorado.

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<sup>1</sup> Pub. L. No. 103-259, 108 Stat. 694

<sup>2</sup> O’Hara, Mary Emily. “Abortion Clinics Report Threats of Violence on the Rise.” *NBCNews.com*, NBCUniversal News Group, 14 Feb. 2017.

This violence and harassment has yet to abate. In fact, just last week, an abortion clinic in Cleveland, Ohio was attacked by vandals for the eighth time in three months.<sup>3</sup> Police believe the same man is responsible for previously damaged windows at the clinic. In New York, anti-choice protestors now face criminal charges for harassment and death threats made against patients and providers at a women's health clinic in Queens.<sup>4</sup> And last month, ten members of the radical anti-abortion group, Operation Save America, were arrested for blocking the entrance of EMW Women's Surgical Center in Louisville, Kentucky, criminally cutting off access to the clinic.<sup>5</sup> While we are encouraged by the Justice Department's preliminary actions to protect the safety and rights of providers and their patients in Kentucky, DOJ must not limit these efforts to only the most blatant violations. Further, while these actions are a strong first step, they do not replace criminal prosecution when the FACE Act is violated.

It has become increasingly clear that now is the time to begin enforcing a law meant to protect those who are accessing a legally protected medical service. Now, as protestors physically block patients' access to abortions and harass providers through death threats and vandalism, it is time for you to direct DOJ and other appropriate agencies to begin protecting providers and their patients from violence, harassment, and threats. We look forward to your response regarding your plans to keep your commitment and begin enforcing the FACE Act to protect not only providers, but the patients they serve. Please provide us with a written response by August 21, 2017.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



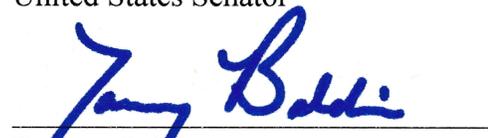
Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

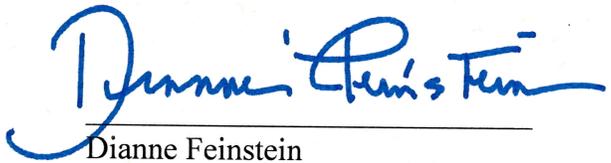


Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

<sup>3</sup> "Police Searching for Man Who Vandalized Preterm Abortion Clinic." *wkyc.com*, Tenga, 21 June 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Greene, Leonard. "Schneiderman Sues pro-Life Protesters at Women's Clinic in Queens." *NYDailyNews.com*, NY Daily News, 20 June 2017.

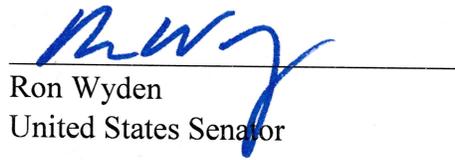
<sup>5</sup> Carter, Darla, and Madeleine Winer. "11 Arrests Made in Protest at Louisville Abortion Clinic in May." *The Courier-Journal*, The Courier-Journal, 19 July 2017.



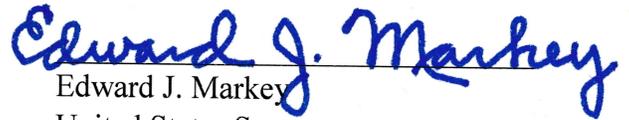
Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator



Patty Murray  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator