Buffer Zone Research on Massachusetts Abortion Clinics
November 2013

In October 2013, NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts surveyed seven of the nine abortion clinics in Massachusetts to determine the necessity and efficacy of the Buffer Zone Law. The clinics were questioned about the presence of protestors at their clinics, the activities of protestors, the success of the buffer zone in protecting patient and staff safety, and what the impact of repealing the Buffer Zone Law might have on their clinic. These clinics included:

- Women’s Health Services in Brookline
- Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts, Worcester
- Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts, Springfield
- North Shore Women’s Center, Lynn
- Four Women Health Services, Attleboro
- Merrimack Valley Women’s Health Services, Haverhill
- Metro West Women’s Health Services, Natick

Summary:
- **All seven of the clinics report a regular presence of protestors**, with at least one to two protestors present daily. This is similar to the 2006 survey, where eight out of ten reported a semi-regular to regular presence of protestors. Clinics that do not actually perform abortions also reported a regular presence of protestors.
- **All of the clinics surveyed believe that the presence of the protestors was a problem**, an increase from the 2006 survey where only five of the ten clinics surveyed found protestors to be a problem.
- **All of the clinics believe that buffer zones are vital.**
  - One clinic contact reported seeing a drastic decrease in the level of violence since the enactment of the buffer zone in 2007, due to the now-required distance between the protester and the patient.
  - Most of the clinic contacts believe that the situation would become more violent for everyone—patients, partners, providers, and protestors—if there was no buffer zone law.

Specific Results:

*Women’s Health Services in Brookline*

- Protestors verbally harass patients: they yell at patients, hold up signs of fetuses that appear to be strangled, and place large signs in the parking lot. Partners of patients at times engage with the protestors, and have resulted in physical altercations and arrests.

- Without the buffer zone, protestors would be able to be closer to the patients.
Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts, Worcester

- The Worcester clinic has at least three protestors daily. On days such as Good Friday, and those around 40 Days for Life, there can be as many as 70 protestors.

- Without the buffer zone the protestors would be able to come to the edge of the property line, with nothing but a decorative plate to block their view from the patients.

Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts, Springfield

- The Springfield clinic has approximately three to five protestors daily, with as many as 40 around Good Friday and 40 Days for Life.

- Without the buffer zone, protestors would be able to revert to actions they took prior to 2007 when they stood at the edge of the driveway and in the street, causing many rear-ends and traffic jams, and could shove the pamphlets into cars of patients.

- Prior to 2007, there was a good deal more violence because protestors were able to approach patients’ cars and follow patients up to the building. There were often physical altercations between patients’ partners and protestors, including a protestor using a fireplace prod to force pamphlets into patients’ car windows, nearly hitting passengers.

Four Women, Attleboro,
Merrimack Valley Women’s Health Services, Haverhill,
Metro West Women’s Health Services, Natick

- All three clinics have one to three protestors on surgical days. All facilities have bulletproof glass and doors that lock automatically.

- Protestors verbally harass patients: they yell comments at patients and hold up signs of mutilated fetuses and babies.

- Without the buffer zone, protestors would be able to touch patients and physically intimidate them.