



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on September 12, 2011

Obama DOJ Aggressively Targeting Peaceful Pro-life Counselors

Under the authority of the Department of Justice (DOJ), over the past two years or so the Obama Administration has aggressively targeted pro-life activists and counselors who try to persuade women arriving at abortion clinics from killing their unborn babies.

[National Public Radio](#) (NPR) reported that under the 1994 Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act (FACE), signed into law by President Clinton, “the Justice Department’s civil rights division has filed eight civil cases since the start of the Obama administration. That’s a big increase over the George W. Bush years, when one case was filed in eight years.”



Subtly connecting the efforts of peaceful pro-lifers with the violent murder of late-term Wichita abortionist George Tiller by a lone gunman, NPR cited the claims of the National Abortion Federation that major violence against abortionists (which has never risen above isolated incidents — all of them condemned by legitimate pro-life groups) has plummeted over the past two years, thanks, in part, to DOJ diligence in pursuing “anti-abortion” activists.

NPR’s Carrie Johnson quoted Ellen Gertzog, director of security for Planned Parenthood, as saying that there has been a “substantial difference between this administration and the one immediately prior” with regards to targeting pro-life activists in their almost exclusively peaceful activity at abortion clinics. “From where we sit, there’s currently much greater willingness to carefully assess incidents when they occur and to proceed with legal action when appropriate.”

Such assessment no doubt led to the targeting of David Hamilton, a Kentucky pro-life counselor who was actually assaulted by an abortion clinic “volunteer” in January 2010 as he attempted to peacefully — and legally — offer literature to women entering Louisville’s EMW Surgical Center (the same facility that, according to [LifeNews.com](#), “was caught on videotape covering up a potential case of sexual abuse of a minor”).

According to the Life Legal Defense Foundation (LLDF), the abortionist “escort” tried to “forcibly block Mr. Hamilton to prevent him from sharing literature with women entering the clinic, literature that would have offered women real choices and alternatives to abortion.”

A year after the incident, following Hamilton’s relocation to Texas, the DOJ tracked down the pro-life activist, filing a \$20,000 lawsuit that charged him with violating the FACE Act. In an interview last year with the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, Hamilton denied any wrongdoing in the case. “I never touched the girl going into the clinic,” he said. “I didn’t come close to touching her. I said what I had to say and kept walking.”



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Dana Cody, executive director of LLDF, charged that the lawsuit is absolutely without merit. “This administration continues to increase the budget deficit by pandering to the abortion lobby, wasting taxpayer monies to hunt down and prosecute the victim rather than the perpetrator,” said Cody. “The allegations against Mr. Hamilton are absolutely ridiculous!”

Cody recalled a similar case, in which Walter Hoye, a pastor from Oakland, California, was arrested after pro-abortion “escorts” at clinics intimidated and harassed him as he stood holding a sign that read, “Jesus loves you and your baby. Please let us help.” Cody recalled to the [Christian Post](#): “The clinic escorts would surround him, they would block his sign, they would keep him from moving, so he couldn’t talk to women, and then law enforcement comes down and arrests him.”

Hoye ultimately served 18 days of a 30-day jail sentence before his conviction was overturned on appeal. “The escorts cause the commotion and then they accuse the sidewalk counselors of doing what they just did,” Cody said.

[LifeNews.com](#) recently reported on a high-profile case in which the DOJ has used the FACE Act to prosecute an elderly pro-life activist in Maryland, after he allegedly stepped on a woman’s shoe at an abortion clinic. For more than ten years, reported LifeNews, Richard Retta (pictured above) “has helped women heading to the Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington abortion center find the kind of alternatives the abortion business never provides.”

But the DOJ’s Civil Rights Division “sees the gentle man as some sort of terrorist and it has filed a lawsuit claiming Retta is one of ‘the most vocal and aggressive anti-abortion protesters,’ ” continued LifeNews. “How so? The Obama administration claims, ‘On one occasion, defendant walked so closely to a patient that he stepped on the patient’s shoe and broke the shoe strap.’ ”

Even NPR described Retta’s activities as gentle and unobtrusive, describing how he customarily shows up for his pro-life duty at the abortion clinic, carrying nothing more than rosary beads and pamphlets informing women about the dangers of abortion. “Please don’t let them take your child’s life,” NPR quoted Retta as telling one woman as she prepared to enter the clinic. “You don’t have to. We can and will help you. Don’t let them take your child’s life. Let us help you.”

Nonetheless, according to LifeNews, the DOJ insisted in its lawsuit that the elderly Retta “attempted to, and did, by physical obstruction, intentionally intimidate or interfere with persons because they were or had been providing or obtaining reproductive health services, or in order to intimidate such persons from providing or obtaining reproductive health services at the Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington.”

According to Tina Korbe, writing on the conservative commentary site [Hot Air](#), those who know Retta personally “describe him as a peaceful, prayerful man, who regards his sidewalk counseling outside the Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington as a ministry.” Korbe noted that the committed pro-life counselor “even conducts weekend training sessions to encourage other pro-life advocates to stand outside the facility to offer words of hope, encouragement, and possibility to the young women who come and go from the abortion center.”

Korbe wrote that at the sessions, according to someone who has attended, Retta “specifically emphasizes that the point of sidewalk counseling is not to block access, but, instead, to remind pregnant women that they do, in fact, have a choice other than abortion — and to offer post-abortion healing, as well, as few abortion centers prepare women for all of the possible emotional consequences of their decision.”



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While the elderly father of seven is the personification of gentleness and compassion toward the women he counsels, he has, by contrast, been the victim of violence at the hands of abortion “volunteers” and “escorts.” According to NPR, Retta, who “is moved by his Catholic faith to do what he calls sidewalk counseling ... has gotten pushed around outside the clinic.... He says he was standing by the gate and a woman sprayed him with pepper spray in July, putting him ‘out of commission’ for a while.”

Xochitl Hinojosa, a DOJ spokesperson, insisted to NPR that her department takes “seriously our responsibility to enforce FACE fully and fairly and in a manner that does not infringe on any First Amendment rights.” Such full and fair enforcement has resulted in a partnership between the FBI and such pro-abortion groups as Planned Parenthood, the National Abortion Federation, and the Feminist Majority Foundation. According to LifeNews, in August 2010 the federal law enforcement agency and the pro-abortion organizations co-sponsored a training seminar on combating “Violence Against Reproductive Health Care Providers” (click for the official training manual).

Pro-life advocates who were permitted to attend the training said that the examples of “violence” against abortionists “included praying, providing women outside abortion centers with alternatives information, and peaceful protesting or picketing,” reported LifeNews.

And what has been the result of such “violence” at the hands of pro-life activists? Tina Korbe wrote that by some estimates, “over the past 14 years or so, Retta’s words have resulted in more than 1,000 ‘saves,’ what members of the pro-life movement call the change of heart that leads a pregnant mother to choose to have her child.”

Han Spakovsky of the [Heritage Foundation](#) wrote on [NationalReview.com](#) that abortion proponents insist “one of their goals is to reduce the number of abortions, yet Retta is being attacked by the Obama Justice Department because of his very success in persuading women to make life-giving choices.” Noting that the DOJ described the gentle pro-life counselor as “among the most vocal and aggressive anti-abortion protestors” outside the clinic he frequents, Spakovsky suggested that the Obama Administration’s real problem with Retta is a political one: like thousands of other pro-life counselors just like him standing vigil at abortion clinics all over America, he “offers women an authentic choice, in a one-option zone.”



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