

**Chapter Action and Social Media Kit:
Supreme Court Clinic Buffer Zone Ruling
*McCullen v. Coakley***



Summer 2014

National Organization for Women



Dear Leaders,

This January the Supreme Court heard arguments on *McCullen v. Coakley*, a case on the constitutionality of protective buffer zones around abortion clinics. The court is expected to announce its ruling on the case soon. NOW is hoping that the court will rule in favor of buffer zones and keep clinics safe. If instead the court rules buffer zones unconstitutional, it will remove a key defense of clinics that have historically been targets of violence perpetrated by anti-choice extremists.

A ruling against buffer zones would be a ruling against the safety of abortion care providers and women who seek abortions. As the grassroots arm of the women's movement, NOW is committed to standing in solidarity with abortion clinics and abortion care providers. The goal is to engage NOW chapters in a coordinated wave of action across the country that reminds the public that women deserve safe access to abortion services.

Taken together, the voices of NOW chapters across the country will be a powerful statement in support of abortion clinics, abortion care providers, and a woman's right to choose. Although the Supreme Court may rule against buffer zones, NOW members can help show that support for abortion rights is strong.

We hope that the resources provided in this kit help your chapter engage in meaningful action in the wake of this Supreme Court decision. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact us. Thank you for your commitment.

In Sisterhood,

NOW National Action Center

Background

Since abortion was legalized in the historic 1973 *Roe v. Wade* case, abortion clinics have faced a storm of protests by anti-choice activists. Many of these protestors have turned violent, committing thousands of incidents of anti-choice violence against clinic workers. This violence has included everything from vandalism, hate mail, and trespassing to arson, stalking, bombing, and the murder of abortion providers.

Much of this disruption, such as obstructing clinic entrances and picketing, has negatively impacted women who are seeking abortions as well. Women are regularly harassed and intimidated by anti-choice protestors. Protestors surround moving vehicles, scream at women as they enter the clinic, and hold graphic signs, all in an effort to dissuade women from having abortions. To further intimidate women, some protestors have even photographed women and their families as they enter or exit clinics, as well as their cars and license plates, and have posted these photographs on anti-choice websites.

Buffer zones have been created by injunctions, ordinances, and laws that have helped to derail some of this violence by requiring protestors to stay a given distance away from clinics. The first clinic buffer zone was created by injunction around Chico Feminist Women's Health in California in 1989. Since then, Colorado, Massachusetts, and numerous cities and towns around the country have passed laws and ordinances creating buffer zones. Individual clinics have also sought injunctions against specific groups of protestors that have resulted in protective buffer zones around clinics.

These measures allow anti-choice protestors to continue their picketing but also make it possible for clinic workers and patients to enter and exit the building more safely. According to a 2013 survey by the National Abortion Federation, 51% of clinics with buffer zones saw a decrease in criminal activity once their buffer zones went into effect. 75% of these clinics said that their buffer zones made clinics more accessible for patients, their families, and clinic workers.

Buffer zones are not unique to abortion clinics. Many states have buffer zones for funerals, and polling places and many government buildings also have buffer zones. The Supreme Court itself has a buffer zone that requires protestors to stay off the court's marble plaza.

The case in question, *McCullen v. Coakley*, charges that a 2007 Massachusetts buffer zone law violates protestors' freedom of speech. The law requires protestors to stand 35 feet away from clinic entrances, a distance that can be walked in approximately nine seconds. A ruling against the constitutionality of this law could lead to the repeal of similar laws across the country, leaving clinics once again extremely vulnerable to anti-choice violence, harassment, and intimidation.

What You Can Do

This event has two main players: the Supreme Court, which may rule buffer zones for clinics illegal even though it has its own buffer zone, and clinics around the country, who

may find themselves and their patients without an essential form of protection from often-violent anti-choice protestors.

A favorable ruling would support the safety and dignity of women seeking abortions and abortion care providers. NOW chapters can use a favorable ruling to engage their communities in a discussion about the continued importance of abortion rights. Members can write letters to the editor explaining the importance of this victory. NOW chapters should also take this time to reflect on how their actions have contributed to this victory.

In case of an unfavorable ruling, NOW chapter actions should follow one of two paths: Protesting the hypocritical ruling of the Supreme Court by protesting at federal courthouses, or demonstrating at local abortion clinics in an on-the-ground statement of protection and solidarity.

Protesting the Courts

If your chapter chooses to react to the Supreme Court decision by protesting at a nearby courthouse, make sure that you are protesting at a federal courthouse. Also check to see if your local federal court supports the clinic buffer zone issue and whether it may have upheld the constitutionality of buffer zones before the case reached the Supreme Court. The buffer zone decision was made in the federal court system, so protesting at a state or local courthouse would not be appropriate. It would also not make sense to protest a court that upheld clinic buffer zones. Check to see if you will need a permit.

Protecting the Clinics

If your chapter chooses to react to the Supreme Court decision by demonstrating at a nearby clinic, make sure that you contact the clinic in question beforehand to make sure that your presence is welcome. Although many clinics appreciate support from likeminded individuals, some may wish to keep their locations as secret as possible in an attempt to avoid anti-choice violence. Some clinics also prefer to avoid any activities that may disrupt their patients' clinic visit. Make sure to communicate your exact plans to the clinic; tell them when you plan to demonstrate and how many people you expect to attend, as well as whether you plan to include literature, signs, or other items. Megaphones or amplified sound are generally not a good idea at clinic rallies, as they may be more harmful than helpful to the general atmosphere around the clinic.

Media Attention and Press Releases

Chapter leaders should work to obtain press coverage for events. Not only will it elevate your event and inform the public about an important issue, but it will help you attract new members.

First, send a press alert including the basic event details (who, what, when, where, and why) to local media outlets. Next, follow up with a phone call a few days before the event to

encourage different media outlets to send reporters and photographers. Finally, send out a press release the day of the event and be sure to bring extra printed copies to the event.

Appoint a spokesperson for the event, usually the chapter president, and prepare talking points in advance. The most common question journalists ask is “why are you here?”

Things to Keep in Mind

Whether you are protesting the courts or protecting the clinics, there are a few things to keep in mind:

- Remember to check to see if a permit is necessary for your demonstration. If you are supporting a clinic, work closely with the clinic in advance to ensure your presence will be welcome.
- Look over the permit guidelines thoroughly so that you are aware of exactly where you are allowed to be and what you are allowed to do. Comply with any law enforcement directives.
- Designate a point person who will introduce themselves to any law enforcement present should anything go wrong. Ideally this will be whoever is listed on the permit.

You should also remember to bring:

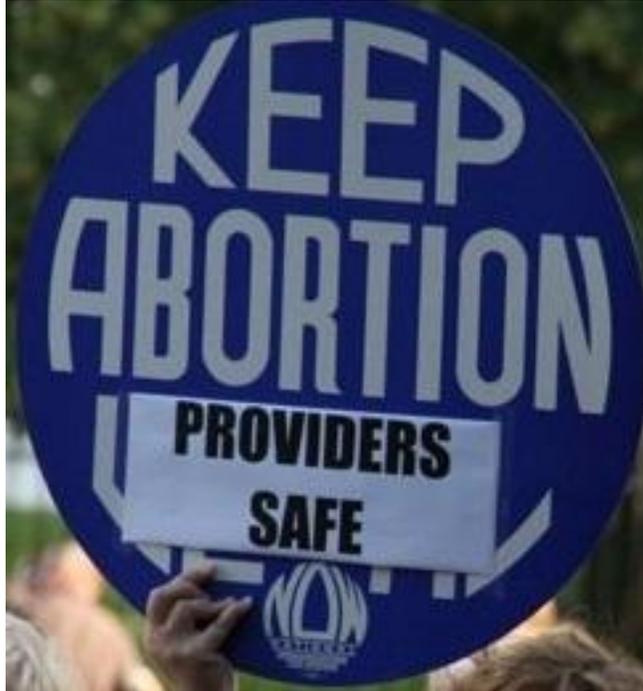
- Copies of the permit (if required)
- Copies of your press release
- NOW rounds, Keep Abortion Legal rounds, and other signage
- A bull horn or sound system IF you are a good distance from the clinic or they have no patients that day
- Pro-Choice chants (see Appendix A)
- Cameras to document your event

Report Your Action!

To ensure our voices have the maximum impact, report your actions to the National Action Center through photos, video, or any other form of documentation. If your event receives any press coverage, make sure to follow up and find links to the news stories. Send any documentation of your action, as well as any links to news stories, to the National Action Center Field Team at fieldorg@now.org.

Suggested Signs/Slogans

Alter your “Keep Abortion Legal” NOW round to read “Keep Abortion Providers Safe” on one side and “Keep Abortion Patients Safe” on the other. After all, abortion rights are about more than legal abortion—they are also about abortion access, ending stigma around abortion, and safety for both abortion providers and patients.



Social Media

You may find social media useful in your planning. You can use social media to promote your event or to add another dimension to your demonstration. The social media section of this kit provides sample tweets, hashtags, Facebook posts, and graphics to use in response to the Supreme Court's ruling on abortion clinic buffer zones.

Hashtags

#BufferZones
#TrustWomen
#ReproRights
#ProChoice
#ProtectTheZone
#Abortion

Follow for Retweets and New Material

@NationalNOW
@NatAbortionFed (National Abortion Federation)

Other Ideas

Sister NOW Chapters
Politicians
Local clinics

Don't Forget!

Put a "." before the @ symbol. This ensures that your tweets will be seen by a wider audience. Example: .@NationalNOW knows #BufferZones are vital to clinic safety. Join us!

Tweets

Clinics need protection! @USSupremeCourt rules against #BufferZones, leaving patients and abortion clinic workers vulnerable.

8 abortion providers have been murdered since 1993. #BufferZones keep clinic workers safe! #ProtectTheZone

Dr. Tiller was murdered for being an abortion care provider. His motto was #TrustWomen. Read more: <http://goo.gl/EVc4Cf>

#BufferZones help reduce violence and intimidation from anti-choice activists. Read more: <http://goo.gl/BGNAl6> #ProtectTheZone

Over 40 bombings at abortion clinics since 1977 demonstrate the need for #BufferZones #ProtectTheZone

Without #BufferZones, clinics are targets for invasion, vandalism, and trespassing. #ProtectTheZone

.@USSupremeCourt removes clinic #BufferZones but keeps its own. #hypocrisy

Abortion clinics have been targets of bombings, arson, and vandalism. But the @USSupremeCourt can't see why clinics need #BufferZones.

Violent protestors threaten and intimidate women and make abortion inaccessible. #BufferZones #TrustWomen

Without #BufferZones, anti-choice protestors obstruct entrances to clinics, blocking women from accessing abortion services. #TrustWomen

.@USSupremeCourt rules against #BufferZones, giving anti-choice extremists full reign to intimidate clinic workers, patients #ProtectTheZone

Women shouldn't be afraid to go to clinics because protestors will harass them at the doors. #BufferZones #TrustWomen

Did the @USSupremeCourt forget 1000s of incidents of clinic violence since the 70s? Removing #BufferZones destroys clinics' best defense.

Women deserve safe access to abortion. Without buffer zones, it's harder to keep clinics and patients safe. #TrustWomen #ProtectTheZone

@NatAbortionFed survey: 51% of clinics w/ buffer zones saw a decrease in violence after their buffer zones created #ProtectTheZone

Clinic escorts help protect women from protestors as they enter clinics. Thank you clinic escorts!! #ReproRights #ProChoice

Clinic escorts stand strong with clinics, providers, and patients! #ReproRights #ProChoice #TrustWomen

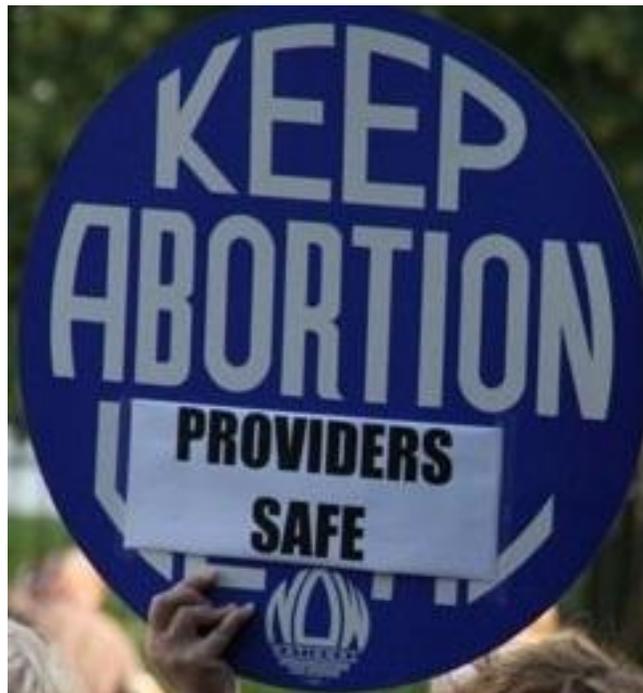
@NatAbortionFed survey: 92% of clinics worry about safety of patients, clinic workers approaching clinics b/c of protestors #ProtectTheZone

@NatAbortionFed survey: 75% of clinics w/ #BufferZones reported that zones led to better access to clinic #Abortion #ProtectTheZone

@NatAbortionFed survey: Almost 90% of clinics have had patients express worry about their safety when entering clinic #ProtectTheZone

Graphics

To use: Right click the photo and save it to your computer. Then upload the photo to Facebook and Twitter.



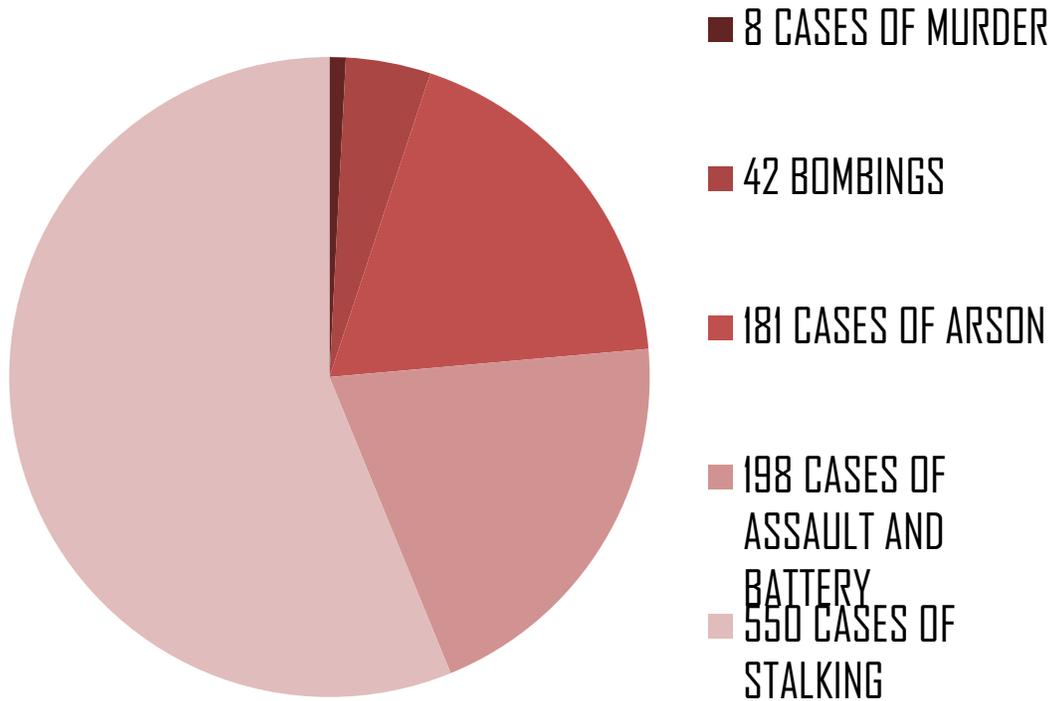
Facebook Caption:

Abortion rights are about more than just legalizing abortion—it’s also important that access to abortion is safe, for both the woman involved and the abortion care provider. Buffer zones help protect abortion care providers, but with the Supreme Court ruling against them, abortion providers are left without an important safeguard.

Twitter Caption:

#BufferZones are essential to keeping abortion providers safe. #ProChoice
#ProtectTheZone

CLINIC VIOLENCE SINCE 1977



Facebook Caption:

Since 1977, thousands of acts of clinic violence have been committed by anti-choice activists. Buffer zones help protect clinic workers and women seeking abortions from these attacks.

Twitter Caption:

Clinics have faced 1000s of attacks from anti-choice activists since 1977. #BufferZones protect clinics from this violence. #ProtectTheZone

Appendix A

Clinic Buffer Zone Ruling Chants	Clinic Buffer Zone Ruling Chants
<p>Not the Church, not the state, Women must decide their fate!</p> <p>Racist, sexist, anti-gay, Right-wing judges, go away!</p> <p>Gay, straight, black, white We all unite for women's rights!</p> <p>Pro-life, that's a lie, You don't care if women die!</p> <p>Pro-life men have got to go, When you get pregnant, let us know!</p> <p>Our bodies, our lives, Our right to decide!</p> <p>2,4,6,8, Separate church and state!</p> <p>2,4,6,8, Abortion rights in every state!</p> <p>5,4,4,5, These decisions change our lives!</p> <p>Ho, ho, hey, hey! Roe v. Wade is here to stay!</p> <p>Show me what democracy looks like! <i>This</i> is what democracy looks like!</p> <p>Women's rights are under attack! What do we do? Stand up! Fight back!</p> <p>Don't go back to times primeval Keep abortions safe and legal</p> <p>We say pro-choice They say no choice</p> <p>Hey, hey! Ho, ho! Clinic terrorists have got to go!</p> <p>Racist, sexist, anti-gay Born-again bigots go away!</p>	<p>Not the Church, not the state, Women must decide their fate!</p> <p>Racist, sexist, anti-gay, Right-wing judges, go away!</p> <p>Gay, straight, black, white We all unite for women's rights!</p> <p>Pro-life, that's a lie, You don't care if women die!</p> <p>Pro-life men have got to go, When you get pregnant, let us know!</p> <p>Our bodies, our lives, Our right to decide!</p> <p>2,4,6,8, Separate church and state!</p> <p>2,4,6,8, Abortion rights in every state!</p> <p>5,4,4,5, These decisions change our lives!</p> <p>Ho, ho, hey, hey! Roe v. Wade is here to stay!</p> <p>Show me what democracy looks like! <i>This</i> is what democracy looks like!</p> <p>Women's rights are under attack! What do we do? Stand up! Fight back!</p> <p>Don't go back to times primeval Keep abortions safe and legal</p> <p>We say pro-choice They say no choice</p> <p>Hey, hey! Ho, ho! Clinic terrorists have got to go!</p> <p>Racist, sexist, anti-gay Born-again bigots go away!</p>