

Protecting Access to Clinics

BACKGROUND: While the handful of murders of abortion doctors and clinic staff have attracted much media attention, family planning clinics report that they frequently experience other serious forms of antiabortion violence. These include bombings, arson and vandalism, as well as violent protests and blockades. In 1994, the federal government enacted the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act, which prohibits intentional property damage and the use of “force or threat of force or...physical obstruction” to “injure, intimidate or interfere with” someone entering a health care facility. States have taken two approaches designed to protect abortion providers. Some states prohibit specific activities, while others have created floating “bubble zones” of several feet around a person who is within a specific distance of a clinic; protesters are prohibited from crossing into that “bubble zone” without the person’s consent.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- 15 states and the District of Columbia prohibit certain specified actions aimed at abortion providers.
 - 11 of the states and the District of Columbia prohibit blocking the entrance to and egress from clinic facilities.
 - 6 of the states and the District of Columbia prohibit threatening or intimidating staff who provide reproductive health services and/or patients entering the clinic.
 - 4 of the states and the District of Columbia prohibit property damage to facilities providing reproductive health services.
 - 2 of the states and the District of Columbia prohibit telephone harassment of staff who provide reproductive health services.
 - 2 of the states and the District of Columbia prohibit other specified actions, such as creating excessive noise outside the clinic, possessing or having access to a weapon during a demonstration at a medical facility, or releasing a substance that produces noxious odor on clinic premises.
 - 3 of the states have “bubble zones” to protect patients from protestors; 2 states require a protected “bubble zone” around a person within a specific distance of a clinic’s entrance or driveway; 1 state prohibits protestors from coming within a specific distance of the clinic.



Advancing sexual and reproductive health worldwide through research, policy analysis and public education.

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PROTECTING ACCESS TO CLINICS

STATE	SPECIFIC PROHIBITED ACTIONS					PROTECTED "BUBBLE ZONE"
	Obstruction	Threat	Damage	Telephone Harassment	Other	
California*	X	X	X			8-ft. zone within 100 ft. of door
Colorado						
Dist. of Columbia	X	X	X	X	Noise	
Kansas	X					
Maine	X			X	Noise, Odor	
Maryland	X					
Massachusetts						35-ft. zone around entrances and walkways
Michigan		X				
Minnesota	X					
Montana	X					
Nevada	X					8-ft. zone within 36 ft. of door
New York	X	X	X			
North Carolina	X	X			Weapon	
Oregon	X		X			
Washington	X	X	X	X		
Wisconsin		X				
TOTAL	11 + DC	6 + DC	4 + DC	2 + DC	2 + DC	3

* Requires the collection and analysis of data by state attorney general's office and training for law enforcement officers by experts on clinic violence.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

For information on state legislative and policy activity click on Guttmacher's [Monthly State Update](#) and for state level information and data on reproductive health issues, click on Guttmacher's [State Center](#). To see state specific abortion information click on [State Facts About Abortion](#).

Lin V, [Anthrax threats, continued violence prompt renewed attention to clinic, client protection](#), *The Guttmacher Report on Public Policy*, 2001, 4(6):13-14.

The Alan Guttmacher Institute, [High court strikes down 'partial-birth' ban, upholds protections for clinic clients](#), *The Guttmacher Report on Public Policy*, 2000, 3(4):12.

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