

Why I #StandWithPP



I wanted to write and let you know why I support the doctors and clinic workers of Planned Parenthood who help people obtain abortions, often at great personal cost.

The current call to defund Planned Parenthood has been coordinated with attack videos that are highly edited in order to demonize the doctors who were filmed. As David Cohen and Krysten Cannon document in their book, "Living in the Crosshairs," the personal nature of political attacks on abortion in this country have led to harassment, stalking, and violence against providers and their families.

In Kansas, Dr. George Tiller's acquittal, after years of investigations by anti-abortion state officials, so enraged one of the trial spectators that he later led pickets outside Dr. Tiller's clinic and church, and then shot and killed him in front of his family and congregation.

This summer, during Operation Save America's national convening in Alabama, a doctor who at one time was a medical director at Planned Parenthood sent the following message to friends to assure them that he was all right:

"I ask you to share my sense of perspective on the attempts to intimidate women and those of us who support their assertion of their human rights," wrote Willie Parker, who now travels to perform abortions in Alabama and other states where there

are no doctors to provide the service.

“I am fine here in my home state,” he wrote. “I am aware of the critics and that some of them are dangerous, just as Dr. King and others in the civil rights movement always knew that the Klan was around and sometimes they showed up at the church during the meeting... Here is the bottom line: I am going to stay safe, women are going to be served, hate speech and mob behavior cloaked in the facade of constitutional rights will not prevail, and I hope that the appallingly silent good people will wake up and speak up.”

Last year, Planned Parenthood provided health care for over 2.5 million people – including abortion care, routine exams, life-saving cancer screenings, contraception, and testing and treatment for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. It served another 1.5 million people through sex education programs.

Fetal tissue has been used in research since the 1930s, leading to the development of critical advances including the polio, rubella, and varicella vaccines. Some Planned Parenthood affiliates across the country participate in fetal tissue donation programs, which are legal – but 89 percent of abortions are performed so early that there is no opportunity to donate tissue.

The current attack on Planned Parenthood is not about basic health care, or the ethics of tissue donation, which notably is supported by people across the political spectrum, including those opposed to abortion. It is an attack on the right to abortion itself. And tainting the doctors who provide them is not a tactic to spur political discourse. It is a tactic to incite violence. Most abortions are performed in standalone clinics, leaving both clinic workers and patients seeking care vulnerable to exposure and harassment. In 2011, 84 percent of clinics experienced some form of anti-abortion harassment; 53 percent of clinics were picketed 20 times or

more.

What was edited out of the attack videos is how deeply Planned Parenthood doctors and other providers care about the patients they serve, and that they continue to work in the face of such harassment and violence. And that for many of their patients, abortion care is part of basic, and sometimes life-saving, comprehensive reproductive health care.

In solidarity,

Mia Kim Sullivan

Director

Civil Liberties and Public Policy Center

Letter originally published in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* on August 4 2015