

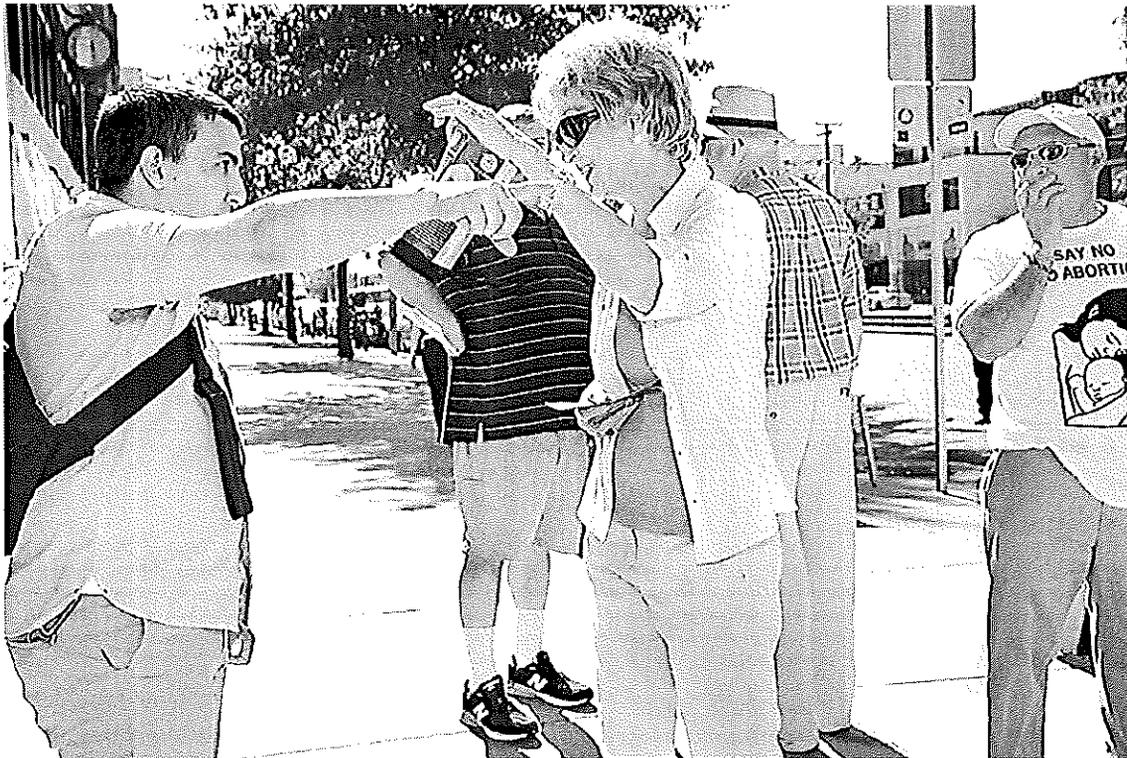
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Abortion battle spills across line at Boston clinic

Territory no longer protected as buffer zone erased



WENDY MAEDA/GLOBE STAFF

Abortion rights supporter Cameron Pond (left) and abortion protester Ruth Schiavone faced off.

By [Evan Allen](#) and [Claire McNeill](#) | GLOBE STAFF | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JUNE 29, 2014

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For the first time in seven years, the Saturday morning antiabortion protest in front of Planned Parenthood on Commonwealth Avenue in the Back Bay pushed past the arcing yellow line that once marked protected territory: the 35-foot buffer zone. Activists chanted, prayed, and sang during a nonviolent six-hour protest that occasionally erupted into vitriol and shouting.

“Please don’t kill your baby! You can celebrate a birthday next year!” protesters shouted at young women entering the clinic. They waved signs imploring passersby to say no to abortions, some depicting infants nestled serenely in their mothers’ arms, another showing a bloody baby clutched by hands bearing the marks of stigmata.

At its height, the protest drew about 70 people — three times more than the average Saturday morning crowd, typically the largest gathering of the week — a turnout inspired by Thursday’s US Supreme Court ruling that struck down the Massachusetts law that since 2007 had kept them outside the yellow line.

“I have a friend that had an abortion 45 years ago. I saw what she suffered, and that’s why I come,” said Mary O’Donnell, 82, of Arlington, clutching a handful of pamphlets, rosaries, and medals. “To let them know there’s another option.”

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The Supreme Court ruling, she said, “just gives us the chance to be a little bit closer, to let them know that we care.”



Court throws out abortion clinic buffer zones

The Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the Mass. law violated the First Amendment.

Many of the young women entering the clinic, however, appeared upset by the crowd, and hustled through with their heads down, some clutching the hands of their partners.

“You have to walk through this circle of people staring at you and talking to you and judging you,” a young woman named Julie said after leaving the clinic. “It’s very intimidating.”

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Julie, who was not at the clinic for an abortion and asked to be identified only by her first name to protect her privacy, said that as she walked in, one person tried to hand her pamphlets and another shouted to her: “Fetuses have fingernails and a heartbeat.”

To her, the Supreme Court’s ruling felt hateful to women.

“Sitting in there today, I was thinking about all these protesters outside, and what if somebody just threw a bomb in?” she said. “That’s what was going through my mind when I was getting my blood pressure taken.”

Security was tight Saturday morning, with police showing up shortly after the first protesters arrived, and standing on the sidewalk and street.

“We have officers up here to make sure our city ordinances are being enforced in both directions,” Boston Police Captain Wayne Lanchester said. “There’s more interest with the decision, and we understand that.”

Marty Walz, president and CEO of the Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts, said the clinic will now need escorts to shepherd patients through the crowd every day it is open, not just on Saturdays.

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“We know there’s horror at the court’s ruling,” Walz said. In anticipation of that ruling, Planned Parenthood received about 100 applications from people volunteering to work as escorts, she said. In the first 24 hours since the ruling, they were overwhelmed with nearly 200 more.

Since the ruling, said Walz, Planned Parenthood has received many complaints from patients about the protests, and more patients than usual have canceled appointments.

“Our patients and staff are subjected to this extreme, aggressive behavior, but that’s what the Supreme Court thinks is appropriate for the women of this country,” Walz said.

Planned Parenthood’s Worcester and Springfield locations also have abortion services, and Walz said protesters at the Worcester location have been crowding the driveway to the clinic’s parking lot since the buffer zone was struck down. The Springfield location is surrounded by private parking lots and has not seen an uptick in protester activity, she said.

Walz said Planned Parenthood will use “all remedies” to address protesters who become abusive, including asking to have them arrested and prosecuted or seeking injunctions.

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Lawyers for Planned Parenthood are working with the state to seek new laws to keep patients safe, though she said it was too soon to say what those laws would look like.

The 2007 buffer zone law struck down Thursday had broadened a previously enacted floating buffer zone, which kept protesters at least 6 feet away from anyone within 18 feet of a clinic. That law was passed after the 1994 fatal shootings of two staffers at abortion clinics in Brookline by John C. Salvi 3d, of Hampton Beach, N.H.

Salvi killed 25-year-old Shannon Lowney of Arlington and 38-year-old Lee Ann Nichols of Salem, N.H., and injured five more people in Massachusetts on Dec. 30, 1994, before fleeing to Virginia, where he sprayed bullets into another clinic before being arrested. He died of an apparent suicide in prison two years later.

Teresa Roberts, who is currently a registered nurse at the Commonwealth Avenue Planned Parenthood, was working at the Brookline Planned Parenthood in 1994 and was friends with Lowney. Roberts was working in a refugee camp in Mexico the week of the shooting and did not hear the news until she arrived at the airport to return home.

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“I didn’t want my friend to tell me who it was who died, I wasn’t emotionally ready. . . . I wanted my mother to tell me,” she said. “I spent that plane flight crying and crying and thinking to myself, ‘What if it was this person? What if it was this person?’ ”

Roberts said that so far, the protests have not gotten out of hand, and that she worries more about her patients than herself. Still, the threat of escalation looms.

“I always have that fear, somewhere deep,” she said. “I never stopped for a moment thinking that this is something that I need to do.”

The protesters insist they are engaged in prayer and counseling, not bullying or harassment, and certainly never violence. They point out that Salvi was not a member of their group, and in fact sprayed a protester’s car with bullets.

“I pray quietly . . . I don’t shout,” said Bill McMakin, 81, of Burlington, who has been coming to say the rosary twice a week for years and said that he never speaks to patients unless they talk to him first. If anyone is out of line, he said, it’s passersby who swear and make obscene gestures.

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“All we want to do is try and talk the women out of killing their babies,” he said, running his fingers over the beads in his rosary, where images of tiny flesh-colored fetuses were curled inside each of the virgin mother’s tears.

Saturday’s protest drew a handful of abortion rights supporters, who mostly stood quietly within the yellow line.

“We’re a small number, but one woman going into a clinic is an even smaller number,” Luca Cucchiara, 19, of Roxbury said. “We help them be bigger.”

Few verbal confrontations erupted, and those that did were between members of the two groups.

Cameron Pond, 26, of Cambridge, who called the speech and actions of the protesters “a form of violence,” at one point clashed with Ruth Schiavone, a self-described ‘sidewalk counselor’ from Norwood, as Schiavone repeatedly tried to hand pamphlets to a young woman who refused them. For about eight minutes, Pond and Schiavone yelled at each other just outside the yellow line.

“Let’s get the life here!” Schiavone shouted.

“Let’s not care if she was raped, let’s not care about the patriarchal society,” Pond shot back, as Schiavone sneered “ohhh” at him.

Another man who was apparently an abortion rights supporter began screaming at praying protesters to “Pray harder,” dancing and mocking their religion.

Despite their new freedom of movement, most protesters stayed outside the yellow line.

“This morning, in our group meeting, we said we’re not going to pass the line,” said Antonella Carillo, a leader in the Catholic youth group from Everett called Bonds of Marian Love, which came to pray. “Out of respect for the women and the people coming in, we don’t want to get too close to their personal space. But we’re here. We’re visible.”

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