

Abortion protester's arrest unrelated to prayer, hymns

[usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2024/04/01/abortion-protesters-arrest-unrelated-to-prayer/73166262007](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/factcheck/2024/04/01/abortion-protesters-arrest-unrelated-to-prayer/73166262007)



Tennessee man arrested for blocking access to abortion clinic, not praying | Fact check



Hannah Hudnall

The claim: Paul Vaughn is facing up to 11 years in prison for praying

A March 26 Instagram video ([direct link](#), [archive link](#)) shared by conservative pundit Tucker Carlson shows footage of a man named Paul Vaughn being arrested at his home by heavily armed FBI agents in October 2022.

"Paul Vaughn's crime: Paul Vaughn the father of 11 children, had dared to pray and sing hymns in the hallway of an abortion clinic," says Carlson in the clip. "And for doing that, he faces 11 years in prison."

The post's caption reads, "When you start putting people in jail for praying, it's pretty clear who you're actually working for."

The post garnered more than 100,000 likes in five days. Carlson also shared the claim on [Facebook](#), [TikTok](#) and [X](#), formerly [Twitter](#).

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Our rating: False

Vaughn was arrested for physically obstructing access to an abortion clinic, not for praying. He was convicted of a crime that carries a maximum penalty of 10 1/2 years in prison. The law in question explicitly protects First Amendment speech and also includes language ensuring free access to houses of worship.

Vaughn arrested for blockade, not prayer

Vaughn and 10 others were charged with violating [the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances \(FACE\) Act](#) after allegedly organizing a blockade at a Tennessee abortion clinic in March 2021, according to [a federal indictment unsealed in October 2022](#).

The indictment alleges the group began utilizing social media in February 2021 to organize a series of anti-abortion events in the Nashville area and subsequently planned a March 5, 2021, blockade, which they referred to as a "rescue," at Carafem Health Center Clinic in Mount Juliet, Tennessee. After arriving at the abortion clinic, the group live-streamed themselves standing in front of the entry doors as they "used force and physical obstruction to injure, intimidate and interfere with employees of the clinic and a patient who was seeking reproductive health services," according to a Department of Justice [press release](#).

On Jan. 30, six of the defendants, including Vaughn, were [convicted by a federal jury](#) for violating the FACE Act and "a felony conspiracy against rights." A sentencing hearing was set for July 2, where the six will face a maximum of 10 1/2 years in prison, three years of supervised release and fines of up to \$260,000.

Fact check: [Texas abortion laws specify no charges for the woman seeking an abortion](#)

Vaughn and the others were not arrested for praying and singing hymns, as Carlson claims in his post.

The law the group was charged with violating actually has two elements that explicitly protect religious expression – the opposite of Carlson's baseless claim.

The act, which was [signed into law in 1994](#), makes it a federal crime to intentionally injure, intimidate or interfere with others to limit their access to two different places: reproductive health services or places of worship.

The [law](#) also states that "nothing in this section shall be construed to: (1) prohibit any expressive conduct including peaceful picketing or other peaceful demonstration protected from legal prohibition by the [First Amendment](#) to the Constitution."

USA TODAY reached out to Carlson's team but did not immediately receive a response.

Our fact-check sources:

- Department of Justice, Oct. 5, 2022, [Eleven Defendants Indicted for Obstructing a Reproductive Health Services Facility in Tennessee](#)
- Department of Justice, Jan. 30, [Six Defendants Convicted of Federal Civil Rights Conspiracy and Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances \(FACE\) Act Offenses for Obstructing Access to Reproductive Health Services in Tennessee](#)
- Congress.gov, May 26, 1994, [S.636 - Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act of 1994](#)
- U.S. Code, Sept. 13, 1994, [18 U.S. Code § 248 - Freedom of access to clinic entrances](#)

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