

# Arrests in Memphis as Antiabortion Training Camp Sparks New Era of Clinic Blockades

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**Updated Tuesday, Dec. 9, at 8:05 a.m. PT:** On Friday morning, Dec. 5, approximately 25 individuals participating in the Rescue Resurrection training blockaded the Planned Parenthood health center in Memphis, even though abortion is already banned in Tennessee. (Tennessee bans abortion from the moment of fertilization, with only a narrow, ambiguous medical-necessity exception; physicians face up to 15 years in prison for providing care outside that exception, and there are no exceptions for rape or incest.)

Fourteen individuals were arrested, according to a [press release posted on X](#) by PAAU, one of the groups collaborating with Randall Terry on the clinic blockade training. The release listed several of its members among those detained, including longtime clinic invaders Joan Andrews Bell and John Hinshaw, both of whom were convicted of criminal FACE Act violations and pardoned by President Trump earlier this year.

Local clinic escorts helped defend the clinic and ultimately, all patients were seen.



Abortion-rights supporters and clinic escorts confront antiabortion demonstrators from Operation Rescue outside of a clinic in Little Rock, Ark., July 8, 1994. (Greg Smith / Corbis via Getty Images)

The blockade followed a three-day launch event and militant training camp led by Terry and Terrisa Bukovinac, which began on Dec. 3 in Memphis. The camp brought together leaders from six national antiabortion groups for classes on clinic blockades and invasions—tactics designed to obstruct care at reproductive healthcare facilities, including those that do not provide abortion.

## **As FACE enforcement collapses, antiabortion groups are gearing up to launch a new wave of coordinated clinic blockades.**

**“We are going to blockade an abortion clinic. We are coming for your rights.”**

*—excerpt from a PAAU social media post promoting ‘Rescue Resurrection.’*

Randall Terry, founder of Operation Rescue, is trying to make a comeback by teaming up with antiabortion extremist group PAAU (the so-called “Progressive” AntiAbortion Uprising group, associated with dozens of clinic and pharmacy invasions) to kick off “Rescue Resurrection.” Their stated goal is to revive large-scale clinic blockades, with a formal kick-off training and series of events starting Dec. 3 in Memphis, Tenn.

Terry was one of the leaders of mass clinic blockades that took antiabortion extremism to a new level in the late 1980s and early '90s. Operation Rescue's (OR) orchestrated blockades in Atlanta, Memphis and Wichita drew massive media coverage.

During the blockades, accessing a targeted abortion clinic meant getting through a gauntlet of bodies blocking clinic doors and driveways. Activists would travel state to state for blockades and would go limp when arrested—to represent the “unborn”—requiring three to four police officers to remove each protester arrested and carry them to waiting police buses.



Members of Operation Rescue try to block the entrance to a clinic in Silver Hill, Md., Nov. 18, 1989. (Mark Reinstein / Corbis via Getty Images)

All too often, blockaders would be processed for misdemeanor trespass, issued the equivalent of a traffic ticket and released the same day, only to join the blockade lines *again*. This would frequently result in clinics being forced to close for hours or days at a time. However, OR's tactics floundered when abortion rights supporters mobilized during the 1992 Democratic and Republican conventions. Supporters landed decisive victories in Los Angeles, Buffalo, New York City and Houston to successfully keep clinics open.

Following the murder of Dr. David Gunn during an antiabortion protest outside a clinic in Pensacola, Fla., in 1993, the attempted murder of Dr. George Tiller in Wichita, Kan., and the murders of Dr. John Bayard Britton and his volunteer clinic escort, Lt. Col. James Barrett, outside another clinic in Pensacola the following year, Congress passed the [Freedom of](#)

[Access to Clinic Entrances \(FACE\) Act](#). The new law made obstructing a clinic entrance or exit a federal crime with graduating criminal and civil penalties. In combination with pro-choice mobilization, blockades quickly became a thing of the past. That is, perhaps, until now.



Clinic volunteers shield a patient (under umbrella), and police stand guard nearby, from members of Operation Rescue on Oct. 29, 1988, in Atlanta, part of a staged so-called “National Day of Rescue,” with scheduled protests in more than 30 cities. (Bettmann Archives / Getty Images)

## Randall Terry’s Dangerous Revival

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Terry’s “Rescue Resurrection” comes at a time when the Trump administration has essentially abandoned enforcement of FACE. Not only did [President Donald Trump pardon 23 antiabortion extremists](#) convicted of blockading clinics in Tennessee, Georgia, New York, Michigan and the District of Columbia immediately after assuming office, but Trump’s Department of Justice dismissed all pending FACE cases and severely restricted enforcement of the statute except for “extraordinary circumstances.” The DOJ directive effectively gutted the federal law.

Without enforcement of FACE, most states and local jurisdictions are left with weak and ineffectual options to protect clinics and the patient communities they serve. It’s worth noting under the federal FACE Act, state attorneys general may pursue civil charges and injunctive relief against blockaders. However, as members of Congress [work to repeal the FACE Act](#),

while federal courts are populated with Trump appointees and many states have anti-choice AGs, this is not an option for many. The same is true for the civil private right of action under the FACE Act; many clinics do not have the capacity or desire to sue in federal court to vindicate their rights.



Signs by abortion rights activists outside of the Jackson Women’s Health Organization in Jackson, Miss., on July 7, 2022—known as the Pink House and, at the time, the last abortion clinic standing in Mississippi. Soon after the Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson* (named for the clinic), the Pink House shut down. (Sandy Huffaker / AFP via Getty Images)

Terry’s partnership with PAAU ups the danger. Over the last four years, PAAU and their associates invaded and disrupted dozens of clinics and pharmacies dispensing, or planning to dispense, the abortion pill. PAAU founding member, Lauren Handy, was one of the 23 pardoned by Trump earlier this year.

## Breaking Ground on a New Extremist Training Camp

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According to his social media posts, Terry has purchased an official training camp in Memphis, which includes a church, a “school” for indoctrination, housing and other facilities covering three-quarters of a city block. The facility will be used to host an antiabortion academy capable of training hundreds of militant extremists at a time in tactics including blockades, harassment and other intimidation actions.

In disturbing videos promoting “Rescue Resurrection” dropped on X, PAAU leaders taunt patients and providers alike, making clear their plans to blockade clinics and flout the law.



Police officers arrest antiabortion demonstrators (some from the fundamentalist Christian group Operation Rescue) for blocking access to an unspecified clinic (on Georgia Avenue NW), Washington DC, November 17, 1990. (Photo by Mark Reinstein/Corbis via Getty Images)

“Rescue Resurrection” is gearing up to block reproductive healthcare whether abortion is involved or not. Terry’s training camp will be located in Tennessee, a state that bans abortion from the moment of fertilization. In spite of the near-total abortion ban, “Rescue Resurrection” still plans to target local reproductive healthcare providers as part of their “academy.” Their training includes learning how to terrorize patients and staff at a local Planned Parenthood facility that doesn’t provide abortion, but offers other critical reproductive healthcare services, like contraception—which extremists are vehemently opposed to as well.

## **Pardoned Serial Blockaders Help Lead Militant Training Camp Kick-Off**

“Rescue Resurrection” will feature speakers including Christopher (aka Fidelius) Moscinski and Joan Andrews Bell, two of the 23 convicted under FACE and pardoned by Trump; both individuals have a long history of blockading, invading and terrorizing clinics.



Joan Andrews Bell on April 5, 2022, in Washington, D.C., one of nine antiabortion extremists indicted in 2022 by the U.S. Department of Justice for a violent 2020 invasion of a D.C. abortion clinic. (Anna MoneyMaker / Getty Images)

Bell, known as the “matriarch of Rescue,” was one of eight clinic invaders arrested at Washington Surgi-Clinic on Oct. 22, 2020. During the violent invasion, a nurse was injured, and extremists equipped with chains and ropes shackled themselves together and moved furniture to block the entrance to exam and procedure rooms while terrifying staff and patients.

“Rescue Resurrection” is recycling footage and iconography from Operation Rescue’s large blockades of the late ’80s and early ’90s to advertise trainings and promote the new training institute. The organization states the effort is designed to “revive a bold activist movement” and claims the event is committed to non-violence. But in their video announcement, leaders ask and answer, “Do you know what rescue is? It’s when you put your body between the abortionist and a baby that is about to be killed.” It’s the rhetoric of extremist radicalization. The nostalgia is purposeful—it’s a reminder of when members could blockade clinics with impunity—and serves as a recruiting and radicalization tool for a new generation that never experienced the mass blockade era. Online, extremists have been vocal of their support for the launch, expressing delight and excitement for the Dec. 3 plans.

## Clinics Need Better State Protections from Blockades, Interference and Intimidation

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In the absence of DOJ's enforcement of FACE, clinics must rely on state and local law enforcement. Yet many abortion access states do not have state FACE Act corollaries. In those states, there are often few if any adequate enforcement options to address mass blockades.

Embattled reproductive healthcare providers and patients are already dealing with unprecedented harassment and intimidation. A return to large-scale blockades—if unchecked—will upend the already fragile state of access for patients traveling hundreds of miles from banned states in order to access critical abortion care. And in states where abortion is already banned, like Tennessee, blockades of trusted reproductive healthcare providers will prohibit access to cancer screenings, prenatal care, STI testing and treatment, contraception and more.

### History's Warning

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The resurgence of these blockades carries significant potential for radicalizing participants to violence. James Kopp, who murdered Dr. Barnett Slepian in a sniper attack in 1998 and is suspected of shooting and wounding several other Canadian and U.S. doctors; and Rochelle “Shelley” Shannon, who attempted to murder Dr. George Tiller in 1993, were both active participants in Operation Rescue's wave of blockades in the 1980s and '90s. Kopp traveled to multiple cities to participate, spending weeks in jail in Atlanta in 1988 along with other OR participants. While in jail, he and his fellow prisoners formed the clandestine “Army of God” network calling for the murder of abortion providers. And [Scott Roeder](#), who ultimately murdered Tiller in 2009, was a frequent participant in OR demonstrations in Wichita, including outside the church where Tiller was murdered.

We've been here before. We know how this ends when left unchecked: patients become unable to access time-sensitive care, providers start to live under constant threat, clinics are forced to close temporarily or permanently and healthcare access is determined by whether you can push through a wall of people.

Now more than ever, state and local legislative action, community mobilization and strategic clinic defense are critical. We know communities can and are organizing to protect access. We know that public pressure can force political action to pass state FACE laws. Now is the time to step up and help mobilize support for embattled providers.

### About [Teresa Cisneros Burton](#) and [Lizbeth Sanchez](#)

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Teresa Cisneros Burton is an attorney in Los Angeles, a former prosecutor, and nonprofit leader. She serves as a special advisor for the Feminist Majority Foundation and a board

member for several nonprofit organizations in Los Angeles.

Lizbeth Sanchez graduated from CSU-Northridge with a B.A. in political science and a minor in psychology. While an undergraduate, Sanchez interned for California Congressional leader Rep. Nanette Barragan and served as a peer ambassador for the Menstrual Equity Initiative at CSU Northridge. Currently, Sanchez is a research intern with the Feminist Majority Foundation's National Clinic Access Project while working to earn their M.A. in International Affairs from CSU Long Beach. Sanchez is also dedicated to researching and supporting Afghan women and girls.