

**Testimony of Renee Chelian, Founder & CEO, Northland Family Planning
House Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on the Constitution & Limited Government
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My name is Renee Chelian, and I am the Founder and CEO of Northland Family Planning Centers in Michigan. I have been an abortion provider for more than 50 years, operating three clinics in Southeast Michigan. In all that time, anti-abortion extremists have harmed, violated, and harassed my staff, my patients, my family, and me. Together, over the past five decades, we have faced constant threats of violence in various, disturbing forms: multiple arson attempts, large blockades, bomb threats, a chemical bomb, and even death threats.

Prior to passage of the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act, my clinics were often targeted by Operation Rescue, an anti-abortion organization that staged violent blockades throughout the U.S. Before FACE protections were in place, our doors were blocked by three to four hundred people once a month for more than two and a half years. Clinic staff and I were routinely pricked by safety pins and other unidentified objects and pinched on our legs and buttocks by the extremists outside of my clinics as we attempted to walk over or around them to enter the building or escort patients inside. We were never successful in entering the clinic and, by the end of the day, my legs were black and blue.

During this time, the fear of these threats reached beyond my clinics to my home as well. My husband and I shielded our children from the news and instructed our babysitter to take extra precautions while we were away. Unfortunately, my children still picked up on the threats of violence against their family: at seven years old, my youngest daughter asked for her windows to be bricked up so that “the bad people couldn’t get in and kill us.” My children refused to play outside unless we were with them. It was heartbreaking to watch my daughters live in fear.

My own personal experience with clinic violence inspired my advocacy. I was proud to be part of a group that lobbied then-Attorney General Janet Reno to pass the FACE Act in 1993. Once the law went into effect, the violent blockades immediately stopped. This all ended when President Trump took office for his first term, emboldening extremists to resume their attacks and leading to the most dangerous and appalling episode of clinic violence that I have experienced since the FACE Act became law.

In August 2020, Northland’s Sterling Heights clinic was blockaded by extremists who prevented me and other staff from entering the building. Our clinic was under attack that day—there is no other way to describe it. Patients were trapped in their cars, including three women who were coming in for abortions following the detection of fatal fetal anomalies. One woman was actively losing amniotic fluid and needed immediate medical care. She huddled with her mother and husband, caged in the parking lot, while extremists plastered signs of fake fetuses on her car

windows and shouted “God loves you, God loves your baby.” The woman cried out, “I know God loves me, I know God loves my baby, but my baby is dying.” Her baby was missing most of its brain and had no kidneys. This woman later shared her powerful testimony at trial.

During the blockade, extremists live-streamed the attack. Although they were eventually arrested, officers allowed the perpetrators to continue streaming on the drive to the jail and even within the jail itself. The video was used as evidence by the Department of Justice to convict eight attackers on charges of conspiracy and violating the FACE Act.

It’s no exaggeration to say that this trial was the most brutal and emotionally taxing situation that I’ve ever faced. My staff, my patients, and I repeatedly relived this trauma through six months of pre-trial motions and through every hearing. Some of my staff members were so traumatized that they left their jobs, and many sought mental health support. Sitting through the trial was three weeks of hell—we were scared to be near these attackers, and I required an FBI escort to guide me safely to and from the courtroom. Fortunately, the jury only needed a few hours to deliver their guilty verdict convicting the perpetrators in August 2024.

However, all of this was rendered meaningless when, on January 24, 2025, President Trump officially pardoned the violent offenders who attacked our clinic, leaving us feeling abandoned by the government. To add insult to injury, on April 13, 2026, the Department of Justice fired two of the prosecutors who had worked so hard on our case. When I learned of this new horror, I was sick and worried about my safety. Now that President Trump has given these zealots his blessing, who can we call? Who will protect us?

Make no mistake: the threats are relentless and these terrorists will stop at nothing to block access to essential, life-saving abortion care. Reproductive health clinics like ours continue to confront a pattern of sustained and consistent violence and harassment. We need more federal protections right now. The FACE Act has been instrumental in holding these violent criminals accountable for their actions. I implore you to reject cruel efforts to repeal its critical protections for clinics, providers, staff, and patients. Instead, the Trump administration must, at minimum, enforce the law to its fullest extent, and it is the responsibility of lawmakers like you to ensure that they do so.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony and to advocate on behalf of my patients, staff, and dedicated community, and on behalf of my own family.