



PRESS RELEASE

Seven 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 Michigan

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For Immediate Release

Office of Public Affairs

A federal jury convicted seven defendants today of federal civil rights offenses arising out of their blockade of a reproductive health care clinic in Sterling Heights, Michigan, on Aug. 27, 2020. The defendants were each convicted of a felony conspiracy against rights and a Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act offense. Two defendants were convicted of a second FACE Act offense arising out of a blockade of a reproductive health care clinic in Saginaw, Michigan.

“These defendants orchestrated an unlawful clinic blockade and physically obstructed patients seeking access to their doctors, without regard to the serious medical needs of the women they blocked from accessing reproductive health care,” said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division. “These defendants intentionally broke the law. One woman’s fetus experienced fatal abnormalities and the defendants’ coordinated

campaign of physical obstruction posed a grave and real threat to her health and fertility. Make no mistake: every American enjoys the right to obtain and provide reproductive health services free from physical obstruction, and the Justice Department will continue to hold accountable those that oppress the free exercise of that right. We thank the jury for the time, attention, and careful consideration of the facts of this case.”

“My office is committed to protecting all of the legal rights of our district’s citizens, including the right to access reproductive health care,” said U.S. Attorney Dawn N. Ison for the Eastern District of Michigan. “The defendants convicted today sought to interfere with that right by physically blocking the doors of clinics providing such services. These defendants are entitled to their views, but they are not entitled to prevent others from exercising the rights secured to them by the laws of the United States. This case is about the rule of law, and today’s verdict is a victory for that principle.”

According to evidence presented at trial, Calvin Zastrow, Chester Gallagher, Heather Itoni, Caroline Davis, Joel Curry, Justin Phillips, Eva Edl and Eva Zastrow engaged in a conspiracy to prevent clinic employees from providing, and patients from receiving, reproductive health services, a civil right secured by the FACE Act. As part of the conspiracy, the defendants participated in the “Michigan Holiness Revival Tour,” a camping tour organized by Calvin Zastrow with the express purpose of blockading a reproductive health clinic during the second week of the tour.

During the blockade, the defendants sat or stood in front of the entrances to the clinic so that patients and employees could not enter. Evidence at trial further proved that the defendants blocked a patient, S.S., from entering. The evidence showed that S.S. and her husband had made an appointment at the clinic after learning that their fetus suffered fatal abnormalities, and that attempting to continue carrying the pregnancy carried serious risks to S.S.’s health and fertility. The defendants blocked S.S. from obtaining reproductive health care.

The evidence further proved that Calvin and Eva Zastrow followed a clinic employee around the building in order to prevent her from entering an emergency exit, and that Gallagher and Edl attempted to stall the Sterling Heights Police Department in order to prolong the blockade. Evidence at trial further proved that the defendants violated the FACE Act by using physical obstruction to interfere with the clinic’s employees and patients because the clinic was providing, and patients were seeking, reproductive health services.

According to evidence presented at trial, Edl and Itoni physically obstructed access to a second clinic, in Saginaw, Michigan, on April 16, 2021. The evidence proved that Edl obstructed access by sitting in front of one entrance with a doorstop wedged under the door such that the door could not be opened from the inside, while Itoni used a bicycle lock to chain herself in front of a second door. The evidence proved that Edl and Itoni violated the FACE Act by using physical

obstruction to interfere with the clinic's employees and patients because the clinic was providing, and patients were seeking, reproductive health services.

A sentencing hearing will be set at a later date.

The FBI's Detroit Field Office and Bay City Resident Agency investigated the case.

Trial Attorney Laura-Kate Bernstein of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division and Assistant U.S. Attorneys Frances Carlson and Sunita Doddamani for the Eastern District of Michigan are prosecuting the case.

Anyone who has information about incidents of violence, threats and obstruction that target a patient or provider of reproductive health services, or damage and destruction of reproductive health care facilities, should report that information to the FBI at www.tips.fbi.gov. For more information about clinic violence, and the Justice Department's efforts to enforce FACE Act violations, visit www.justice.gov/crt/national-task-force-violence-against-reproductive-health-care-providers.

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Topic

CIVIL RIGHTS

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