

**United States House of Representatives
House Judiciary Committee
2138 Rayburn House Building
Tuesday, May 16, 2023**

Revisiting the Implications of the FACE Act

**Written Testimony of Tammy Kocher
Executive Director, New Life Family Services
Minneapolis, MN**

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Scanlon, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to join you today to share about our experience since the Supreme Court's Decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*.

My name is Tammy Kocher, and I have the privilege of serving as the Executive Director of New Life Family Services in Minneapolis, Minnesota. For 50 years, New Life has served Minnesota families as one of the most comprehensive, faith-based non-profit organizations of its kind through its five pregnancy centers spread throughout the Minneapolis/St. Paul area and Rochester. We provide professional, life-affirming care through no-cost pregnancy, parenting, and post-abortion services, as well as licensed adoption services. Every year, we serve more than 6,000 women, men, and children through our five centers. We are privately funded and do not receive any state funding.

We are particularly proud of our newest center, a 12,600 square foot building in the heart of urban Minneapolis. This facility houses our largest pregnancy center and a full-service non-profit medical clinic started by African immigrants. It has been a decade-long vision that came to fruition in 2022. (Exhibit A)

Our new building is located in the Phillips community of Minneapolis, which is one of the most beautifully diverse and resilient communities in our state. It also is a community filled with numerous challenges, including generational poverty, illegal drugs, sex trafficking, violence, and gang activity. As you may recall in 2020, Minneapolis was literally on fire after the tragic death of George Floyd. Our new location is approximately one mile north of George Floyd Square. As you can imagine, this community has endured so much over the past several years. While the city of Minneapolis has struggled greatly since 2020 with increasing crime rates and other significant challenges, New Life's love and commitment to this city – and to hard-hit communities in particular – has never wavered. And that is why we are thrilled to finally have a tangible presence in that community.

I will never forget the words spoken by one of our partnering organizations early last year. Through tears, she said, "Everyone is running away from Minneapolis, and you are running towards us. Thank you." It's an honor it is to be a part of this work.

My purpose today is to share about the increasing hostility that pregnancy centers like ours are facing across the country. There are more than 3,000 pregnancy centers in the U.S. that provide compassionate, quality, no-cost medical and social services to hundreds of thousands of women, children, and families every year.

In New Life's 50-year history, we have never experienced the type of attacks we have this past year. Since the *Dobbs* decision, there have been numerous false narratives and outright lies told about the work of pregnancy centers. Minnesota is sadly one of many states that have quickly turned into a hostile environment for pro-woman, life-affirming organizations like ours.

On August 23, 2022, Minnesota Attorney General Ellison issued a misleading consumer alert warning Minnesotans about pregnancy centers like ours, using the same false narratives perpetuated by abortion activists. He claimed that pregnancy centers "may pose as reproductive healthcare clinics despite not providing comprehensive reproductive healthcare to consumers."

But centers like ours are transparent about the scope of services we do and do not provide to women and families. We provide professional, quality health care to our patients, at no cost. Our medical services include comprehensive STI testing and treatment, pregnancy testing, ultrasounds, prenatal classes, and lactation consulting. We employ four registered nurses and we also have multiple advanced medical providers who provide direct services to our patients. We also have a certified lactation consultant and eight licensed social workers on staff, and we are licensed by the State of Minnesota for adoption services.

General Ellison further accuses pregnancy centers of "attempting to prevent or dissuade pregnant people from accessing their constitutionally protected right under the Minnesota Constitution to a safe and legal abortion." In other words, he objects to our pro-life world view—a view that affirms the value of every single human life from the moment of conception to natural death.

The Attorney General's consumer alert falsely states that pregnancy centers "often make misleading and exaggerated claims about the health risks associated with obtaining an abortion," and that pregnancy centers, "do not counsel or provide accurate information about available abortion services." But the truth is that we provide accurate, up-to-date information taken directly from the Minnesota Department of Health to women about the risks and procedures of abortion—something women have a right to know as they weigh whether or not to undergo an abortion. And it is information that abortion clinics often fail to disclose.

These inaccurate statements are harmful to the reputation of pregnancy centers and are categorically untrue for New Life Family Services.

Words are powerful, especially when spoken by people in position of authority. And when those in authority perpetuate and promote falsehoods about pregnancy centers like ours, it can have devastating consequences for our organization, our hard-working, compassionate employees, and the women and families we dedicate our lives to serving.

The day after Attorney General Ellison released his consumer alert, we had threatening posters plastered all over the community surrounding our new clinic. (Exhibit B). We were warned, "If abortions ain't safe, neither are you." And there were also slanderous statements such as "fake

clinic,” language claiming that we “provide false and misleading health info” and that we support “forced birth.”

Just a few months later, on November 11th, there was a protest outside our center near the University of Minnesota. And once again, we were the target of false narratives, harassing language meant to intimidate our staff and dissuade our clients from coming to us (Exhibit C). Vulgar, offensive language was also written across our logo and projected over our awning.

And, on March 4, 2023, a little after 2:00 a.m. we were notified by law enforcement that our new building in Minneapolis—the Phillips location serving in the heart of a community with high needs, was badly vandalized. We had multiple windows smashed in. The front of our building was covered with threatening graffiti messages. They warned that “if abortions aren’t safe neither are you.” Other graffiti stated, “Jane was here,” “F-12,” and “Abort deez nuts.” The vandalism to our non-profit facility did more than \$30,000 worth of damage in a matter of two minutes (Exhibits D-G).

To add insult to injury, there was a protest planned for later that day at the park across the street. The protestors, however, couldn’t resist the backdrop of our damaged building. While we were in the midst of boarding up our broken windows, they moved their protest right in front of our center (Exhibit H).

We are the fifth organization in Minnesota that has been vandalized in these coordinated attacks. Many, many more pro-life centers across the country have endured the same threats and violence. These community-based pregnancy centers, which already operate on shoe-string budgets, are having to divert funds intended to meet our client’s needs. Instead, they have to buy upgraded security cameras and systems, repair damaged buildings and hire security guards. While these attacks are meant to intimidate and hurt us, the people who are ultimately hurt by these attacks are our clients: single moms; families who are struggling to make ends meet; young women who are being pressured into an abortion. They are the real victims here.

The blatant lies and misinformation about pregnancy centers are being perpetuated not only by grass-root activists, but by our own elected officials, mainstream media and many who are in positions of power.

I find it incredibly ironic that we are continually being called a “fake clinic,” yet even the abortion clinics themselves know that isn’t true.

Abortion clinics in our area are referring their patients to us for medical services. Certainly, they wouldn’t do that if they genuinely believed we were a “fake clinic” that doesn’t provide legitimate health care.

Therein lies why we’re under attack—we provide resources and support that are life-affirming. And apparently, doing so is a threat to the abortion narrative and lobby.

The truth is, not every woman facing an unplanned pregnancy wants an abortion. Many of the women we serve want to continue their pregnancy but lack the support and practical resources needed to do so. In addition to the free medical care, each year, our organization provides more than 100,000 diapers to families in need as well as tens of thousands of dollars’ worth of baby

supplies and equipment. Without pregnancy centers and the important work, they do every single day, the three million women who experience an unintended pregnancy each year will be left with fewer options and fewer resources.

We are proud of the positive feedback we receive from our clients. Here are a few examples from this past year:

Best support and care I have ever received in my life. Never met people as good as this. Such an amazing staff.

You guys are absolutely phenomenal. I went to another clinic and they never treated me like this. AND they charged me \$600.

10/10 excellent, welcoming staff.

Whatever you believe about abortion, we should agree that non-profit organizations like ours—that contribute millions and millions of dollars in free services to women, children, and families in their communities—should not be the targets of vandalism and terrorism. The people we serve should not feel threatened simply for walking through our doors to explore life-affirming alternatives. When pregnancy centers aren't safe, our patients are not safe.

Thank you for the opportunity to share about the important work of pregnancy centers like ours and the increasing hostility we are being subjected to. I would be happy to answer any additional questions committee members may have, or clarify any statements made in my testimony.