



## **WLP Statement: Buffer Zone Win at U.S. Supreme Court Significant for Pennsylvania**

*Two of the last remaining statutory buffer zones in the country are enforced in Pennsylvania, which has a long history of anti-abortion extremism*

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**PENNSYLVANIA // February 25, 2024** – On February 24, the U.S. Supreme Court [refused to hear a pair of cases from abortion opponents](#) who claimed that laws that protect doctors and patients from obstructive protests outside reproductive health care facilities violate sidewalk protesters' First Amendment rights.

“This is a big win and welcome relief here in Pennsylvania where, unfortunately, anti-abortion activists have a long history of engaging in obstruction and intimidation of patients and physicians,” **said WLP Executive Director Susan J. Frietsche**. “Harrisburg and Pittsburgh currently enforce buffer zones that were implemented to prevent groups of people from deliberately blocking the sidewalk outside of abortion clinics. Today, they are two of the last remaining continuously enforced statutory clinic buffer zones in the country.”

Buffer zones are limited, fixed areas surrounding a building's entrance designed to protect patients and facility employees from obstruction, unwanted bodily contact, and potential violence.

At issue in the two related cases were buffer zone laws in Carbondale, Illinois, and Englewood, New Jersey.

Carbondale already repealed its buffer zone. The eight-foot buffer zone at issue in Englewood, New Jersey was implemented in 2014 in response to [“aggressive and hostile”](#) anti-abortion protests.

Court documents [asserted](#) the anti-abortion protester challenging the Englewood typically “runs up to patients as they are arriving and runs after and follows patients as they are leaving.”

“We are pleased the Court rejected these meritless cases,” **said Tyler Gillett, Staff Attorney at Women's Law Project**. “This is especially welcome given that President Trump recently pardoned numerous anti-abortion extremists convicted of [crimes including](#) physically blocking patients, breaking into clinics, and accosting patients. Meanwhile, anti-abortion lawmakers in Congress are working to repeal the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act, a federal law to protect patients and health care providers targeted by anti-abortion activists.”

"Pennsylvania, unfortunately, has several risk factors for anti-abortion harassment and violence," **said Lila Slovak, Director of WLP's Philadelphia office.** "In addition to a spike in anti-abortion extremism generally, anti-abortion activists are increasingly targeting patients in reproductive freedom states because, of course, there aren't visible patients left to harass in ban states. Research shows Pennsylvania's relatively high number of unregulated anti-abortion crisis pregnancy centers is also a risk factor for increased harassment and violence."

Pennsylvania Rep. Lindsay Powell [recently announced a state-level version of the FACE Act](#), legislation supported by the Women's Law Project.

Women's Law Project attorneys have been defending buffer zones in Pennsylvania since 2005.

Monday's order indicated that Justice Thomas and Justice Alito disagreed with their colleagues and would have accepted the cases.

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