

## Women's Rights Once Again Denied

by **M. Linda Jaramillo**  
**Executive Minister**

Hundreds of organizations have relentlessly worked for generations to educate our communities about the tragic epidemic of violence against women in this country. Through these concerted efforts, we have made some progress. More people are now aware of the abuse that women and girls face daily (primarily at home) throughout the United States. It has been no small feat to finally realize public laws that hold perpetrators accountable for such violent acts. Law enforcement and local and state courts recognize the problem and have joined women's advocacy groups to help turn the rising tide of violence around.

While these diligent efforts to protect women's personal safety at home have increased, the June 26th U.S. Supreme Court ruling in a Massachusetts case, effectively strips that sense of security. The ruling that removes buffer zones surrounding women's reproductive health care centers widens the door of violence, spilling it into the public square. The free expression of a hateful and threatening protestor is given more importance than the rights of a woman to be safe when she makes health choices for her own body. The claim made by the case's plaintiff, Eleanor McCullen, that she and others just want to "engage in personal, caring, consensual conversations with women about alternatives to abortion" is highly questionable because the prevailing evidence proves otherwise.

If we don't believe that a woman's life is threatened as she seeks reproductive health care services, we need only be reminded of numerous cases in which patients, their companions, clinic workers and doctors were targeted for harassment, intimidation, abuse and even murder. In fact, the Massachusetts law creating necessary safety buffer zones was in response to ongoing threats and the tragic 1994 shooting in Brookline that injured five and killed two young clinic workers, Shannon Lowney (age 25) and Lee Ann Nichols (age 38).

Anyone who has encountered such hostile protests can attest to the fact that they are quite the opposite of peaceful demonstrations. While women’s health clinics are most prominently the targets of these aggressive protests, we see them in other community venues such as grocery stores, retail malls, and even local churches. I know this because several years ago, my local church was the target of such a protest – on Sunday morning. They came fully armed with blown up posters of dead babies and even a large jar filled with a fetus in chemical preservatives. Protecting my innocent and impressionable children from such a hostile imposition on the sidewalk right outside church still makes my skin crawl. It was that very day as we began worship in the safety of our sanctuary that members of my congregation renewed our commitment to accompany a sister who needed our physical, emotional, and spiritual support when faced with making this very difficult decision for herself.

The matter before the court is said to have been one of free speech; however, I submit it was driven by this nation’s continuing controversy about women’s rights to reproductive choice. Otherwise, why are buffer zones that prohibit free speech expression still in place at the election polls, military funerals, and outside the very place in which the Supreme Court made their ruling? It is preposterous in this day and age; after all we know about violence against women, that women are once again victimized by the highest court in our land.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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