

STATEMENT OF REP. RUTH C. RUDY
BEFORE THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE'S
PUBLIC HEARING ON H.B. 1658

I'd like to thank Chairman Caltagirone and the Members of the House Judiciary Committee for holding this hearing on my legislation dealing with clinic violence. I believe that after you have heard the testimony of the witnesses, you will agree that the incidents at clinics are more than protests. They are actions which harm, embarrass and frighten those who are seeking services.

H. B. 1658 will provide abortion clinics the same legal protection we now give banks, schools, businesses, churches, state office buildings and all other places where criminal violence is prohibited. Under the present circumstances, law enforcement has treated violence at these facilities differently than at other places, very often treating the perpetrators with kid gloves by imposing small fines or by sentencing them to a night in jail. This is indeed unfortunate since often these protests take on insidious forms, such as vandalism, death threats, bomb threats and on occasion arson and actual bombings of abortion clinics.

National attention has most recently been drawn to Buffalo, New York and Wichita, Kansas where the tactics of anti-choice demonstrators have often led to violent confrontations affecting patients, health care professionals and law enforcement personnel.

According to National Abortion Federation statistics, last year alone there were two incidences of arson at clinics in North Carolina and Florida; a shotgun was fired through a clinic window in Little Rock, Arkansas; a clinic doctor was detained at a rest stop and the protesters chained themselves to a car in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; in Aurora, Illinois a doctor's office was vandalized with damages estimated between \$175,000-\$200,000; and in Springfield, Missouri a masked gunman entered a clinic shot two people and then escaped unharmed.

The U.S. Constitution allows legitimate forms of protest; however, it also protects an individual's right to seek services at these facilities. Those seeking and providing services are law-abiding citizens and they should not be subjected to taunting, threats or violence.

No matter how you feel about the abortion issue, clinic violence should not be tolerated. Individuals have the right to freely enter a reproductive facility; just as we all have the right to seek services at other medical facilities.

I respectfully urge the members of the House Judiciary Committee to move this bill from committee so that it can be considered by the full House.