

Elderly Pro-Lifer Sentenced to Two Years in Prison, Despite Declining Health

Despite her reportedly declining health, a 75-year-old pro-life activist was sentenced Friday to 24 months in prison and a subsequent 36 months of supervised release after her conviction last November for participating in an October 2020 protest in front of an abortion clinic in Washington, D.C.

Paulette Harlow was convicted under the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act, which prohibits “violent, threatening, damaging, and obstructive conduct intended to injure, intimidate, or interfere with the right to seek, obtain, or provide reproductive health services.”

According to the National Catholic Register, she was also charged with “conspiracy against rights,” which is when “two or more persons conspire to injure, oppress, threaten, or intimidate any person in any State, Territory, Commonwealth, Possession, or District in the free exercise or enjoyment of any right or privilege secured to him by the Constitution or laws of the United States.”

Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia sentenced Harlow. The same judge presided over and sentenced each of the other eight protesters found guilty as a result of the demonstration at the Washington Surgi-Clinic facility, as CBN News reported.

However, unlike some of her co-defendants, Harlow — due to the state of her health — was reportedly allowed to remain on house arrest pending sentencing, according to her attorney, Allen Orenberg.

The defendant’s wife, John, pleaded for leniency because of concerns over his wife’s health. “I feel like Paulette is dying,” he said, according to Live Action. “In my heart, I think she’s having a hard time staying alive. ... We’ve tried to be good people. I love my wife dearly. She’s made me go beyond what I’d otherwise have done [to help others].”

Orenberg, for his part, argued prison would be detrimental to Harlow, noting his client’s allegedly fragile state.

“She cannot continue to exist without support,” he said, “especially that of her husband.”

The D.C.-based protest was filmed by 42-year-old activist Josh Darnel, who was also convicted and is serving 34-month prison sentence. According to his footage of the demonstration, several protesters inside the facility could be seen chained together, praying, and singing songs.

President Joe Biden’s Department of Justice released the following statement Friday: “As the evidence at trial showed, the defendants engaged in a conspiracy to create a blockade at the reproductive health care clinic to prevent the clinic from providing, and patients from receiving, reproductive health services.”

The federal agency stated the pro-life demonstrators “forcefully entered the clinic and set about blockading two clinic doors using their bodies, furniture, chains, and ropes.”

Rebecca Ross, a senior attorney with the Department of Justice, insisted in a statement of her own that the charges against Harlow were “not about the defendant’s beliefs” but instead centered on “violent obstruction of reproductive healthcare” as well as “violating the civil rights of others.”

The federal lawyer accused the septuagenarian of trying to use her poor health as an “excuse” to “escape the consequences” of her actions.

As for the FACE Act, conservative lawmakers have raised concerns about the constitutionality of the legislation and its apparent weaponization by the White House.

Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) and Rep. Chip Roy (R-Texas) introduced a bill in October of last year to repeal the act, calling it “an unconstitutional federal takeover of state police powers.” And conservative leaders called on House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) and House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) to repeal the FACE Act “as soon as possible.”

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