

St. Louis Jury Acquits Pro-Life Advocate in Planned Parenthood 'Terrorist Threat' Case

A Missouri state court jury of eight women and four men found pro-life activist John Ryan not guilty of 17-month-old charges that he had made a terrorist threat against a Planned Parenthood employee.

At the end of a three-day trial, the jury deliberated for about an hour before reaching its verdict on Wednesday.

The charges arose when Casey Spiegel, a Planned Parenthood employee at a clinic in the 4000 block of Forest Park Avenue, reported that as she walked toward Ryan at the entrance to Planned Parenthood's parking lot on December 31, 2016, he told her there were seven bombs in the building. Police arrested Ryan on the scene and held him for 35 hours, when he was released on bond.

The prosecuting attorney for the City of St. Louis filed felony charges against Ryan, accusing him of making terrorist threats. A St. Louis grand jury refused to indict Ryan, at which point, on April 7, 2017, prosecutor Kim Gardner's office used a legal maneuver by refiling the case with "information," which is a process used to bypass the grand jury.

"Planned Parenthood and prosecutor Kim Gardner's office branded me a felony terrorist 17 months ago, and that is permanently imprinted on the internet forever. Yet I am grateful to the Thomas More Society and a jury that saw through these lies and deliberated only an hour to acquit me," Ryan said. "Actually, two juries have cleared me on these charges—first the grand jury and now the trial jury."

The charges against Ryan, originally filed in January 2017, were cited repeatedly by sponsors and supporters, including Planned Parenthood, of the Board of Aldermen's so-called "buffer zone" bill, which would have kept sidewalk counselors and protesters opposing abortion a set distance away from the driveway into Planned Parenthood's parking lot and building.

Sidewalk counselors and protesters claim the right to access the part of the driveway that crosses a public sidewalk.

Ryan noted that "Alderwomen Megan Green and Christine Ingrassia used this so-called terrorist threat as one of the main reasons a buffer zone bill was needed. The campaign to pass the buffer zone ordinance was based on a lie."

Brad Blake, special counsel for The Thomas More Society who represented Ryan, noted, "When you see the video of the entire encounter, it is clear that the accusing witness, carrying a yellow shoulder bag, had zero reaction when Mr. Ryan, in the yellow jacket, was speaking to her. Her lack of reaction speaks louder than words.

"This criminal charge, with its attendant bond restrictions that keep John away from the Planned Parenthood facilities, succeeded in muzzling him and depriving him of his First Amendment rights to use the public sidewalk, as he had for years previously, to voice his pro-life message. This deprivation of his free speech rights was based on bogus allegations by Planned Parenthood that were then advanced by Prosecutor Kim Gardner's office."

Blake, a former prosecutor himself, added, "Prosecutor Kim Gardner's goal was not justice, but rather persecution. That is evident because her office persisted with this case after the grand jury refused to indict Mr. Ryan based on insufficient evidence and after he passed a polygraph test."

{eoa}