

Pro-Life Sidewalk Counselor Ordered to Stay 500 Feet From Abortion Clinic, Despite Exonerating Video

In Detroit, a pro-life sidewalk counselor is being told to stay at least 500 feet away from an abortion clinic.

Chris Coatney advocates the sanctity of life outside of the Summit Women's Center, where he speaks with abortion-bound women and couples in an effort to save their babies. The order was entered after Denise Burrell, the manager of the inner-city abortion clinic, claimed that Coatney's speech was threatening and that she was afraid of him. This assertion was made despite video evidence showing Burrell and colleagues threatening and abusing Coatney.

The Chicago-based Thomas More Society filed a brief last week in The Michigan Court of Appeals, challenging the personal protective order.

"This is a gross abuse of Michigan's stalking law to suppress the free speech of a peaceful, persuasive sidewalk counseling veteran," said Tom Brejcha, president and chief counsel of the Thomas More Society. "Mr. Coatney presented video evidence proving that the claims against him are utterly false. We are confident that our appeal will free Coatney from this gag order, so that he may continue his peaceful efforts to speak the message of life with vigor and eloquence to abortion-bound women."

Under the current personal protective order, Coatney is required to stay at least 500 feet away from the abortion clinic. This prohibits him from participating in sidewalk counseling or otherwise communicating with abortion clinic

patrons, which is something he had done every day at the abortion clinic for several years.

Contrary to the claims of the abortion facility manager, video evidence shows that Coatney has been harassed, even assaulted, by the clinic employees and their associates on multiple occasions:

- In July 2010, relatives of facility manager Burrell tore the pro-life signs off of Coatney's van and ripped them up.
- Three months later, in October, as Coatney drove away from the Summit Women's Center abortion facility after sidewalk counseling, Burrell got in her vehicle and followed him. He stopped at the gas station in an attempt to distance himself from Burrell who dogged him and did not stop until Coatney drove to a police station.
- Later, Coatney was physically assaulted by two clinic patrons. Upon exiting the clinic, they knocked him to the ground and grabbed both his cameras. Coatney righted himself and did not fight back. Inexplicably, this event was cited by the complainant and her lawyer as proof of why Burrell was so afraid of Coatney, namely, that he didn't even fight back when knocked down.

Patrick T. Gillen, Thomas More Society special counsel, explained, "The court entered a personal protective order in violation of the plain language of Michigan's stalking law and with utter disregard for Mr. Coatney's First Amendment rights. We are confident that the Michigan Court of Appeals will reverse this egregious error and set an important precedent governing the application of Michigan law that will protect Mr. Coatney and other peaceful pro-life counselors."

Coatney, a Detroit postal worker, devotes his off-hours almost

exclusively to his pro-life sidewalk counseling advocacy, in order to save babies and their mothers from abortion. He invests significant amounts of his own money to print signs and other pro-life literature.

View a sample Coatney's pro-life literature exposing the "holocaust" against African-American babies [here](#).

Read the Thomas More Society appellate brief [here](#).