



NOW-NYC

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## **Testimony on Behalf of the National Organization for Women New York City Chapter**

**On**

### **Clinic Access Bill (Int. No. 826)**

The National Organization for Women-New York City is in full support of the proposed Clinic Access Bill (Int. No. 826) for New York City.

Expanding the definition of clinic entrances and exits, establishing a 15-foot harassment free zone around clinics and broadening who can rightfully file civil actions against harassers are all important steps in making New York City a place where women and medical staff are guaranteed protection from harm and harassment, while still protecting First Amendment rights. Furthermore, the bill will enable law enforcement to intervene more readily to protect patients and staff and facilitate the successful prosecutions of those who step over the line.

Although many New York City clinics operate in a hostile-free zone, this doesn't have meaning for the women accessing services at some clinics in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and other neighborhoods. Protestors have targeted clinics throughout New York City. They are organized, aggressive and tenacious about intimidating women in need of services and they see a clear strategy in the relentless intimidation that wears on clinic personnel.

As advocates working every day to advance the rights of women and to protect and ensure women's access to comprehensive reproductive health care in New York, we understand the need for this legislation.

We have heard from women for whom this was difficult. One woman characterizes her personal experience of going to a local reproductive health clinic as "humiliating, degrading and infuriating," because of anti-abortion protesters who yelled hostile comments at her while thrusting pictures of aborted fetuses in her face. The act of going to a clinic for an abortion or other family planning services should not come with the question of whether one's safety or life will be jeopardized while entering or exiting the clinic.

New York City needs to take a proactive role and offer protection that can be enforced and be enforced today, without adding burdensome costs of time and money to providers and their patients. By clarifying the definition of clinic entrances and exits and establishing that anyone involved in either obtaining or providing services can take civil action against individuals or groups that block access, this bill puts women and their health care first.

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Clinics are already operating under financial and other constraints that may preclude them from conducting lengthy and expensive legal battles. Clinics need to be able to focus on what they are there for: providing health services. Similarly, women in need of health services should not be forced to take legal action simply to visit their doctor.

It is important that freedom of expression is protected and that people are able to voice their differences. However, going to your doctor should not be difficult, traumatic, or unsafe. New York City needs to adopt the Clinic Access Bill as a vital step toward ensuring women—regardless of which neighborhood they live in or their economic status—access to the comprehensive reproductive health care services they need.

Thank you to Speaker Quinn and the many New York City Council Members who are in support of this bill for taking women's health care and well-being seriously and for leading the way to improve clinic access.

NOW-NYC fully supports this measure.

*About NOW-NYC:* The National Organization for Women is the nation's largest organization working to advance women's rights and improve women's lives. The New York City Chapter of NOW, founded in 1966, is one of the largest chapters in the country with over 5,000 members locally and 35,000 statewide. NOW-NYC works to protect women's reproductive choices, end violence against women and eliminate sex discrimination in our schools, workplaces, and the justice system in New York.