

TO: BOARD OF LEGISLATORS
COUNTY OF WESTCHESTER

Your Committee recommends passage of “A Local Law adding Chapter 425 to the Laws of Westchester County to ensure safe access to reproductive health care facilities.”

Your Committee finds that the right to access reproductive health care facilities and the right to obtain reproductive health care services, treatments, and/or procedures, are essential personal rights protected by state and federal law. Equally, the right to peaceably protest and express one’s views is an essential right protected by state and federal law. Such actions include, but are not limited to, the right to speak, march, demonstrate, picket, pray, associate with others in expressive behavior, or engage in other activity protected by the First Amendment.

Your Committee notes that concerns have been raised about individuals or groups of individuals who may exceed the boundaries of lawful First Amendment expression by engaging in activities that physically prevent individuals from accessing reproductive health care facilities or obtaining reproductive health care services; or by engaging in activities that unlawfully harass or intimidate individuals trying to access such facilities and services. In fact, for example, on March 17, 2022, three men were found guilty of unlawfully trespassing at All Women's Health & Medical Services, a reproductive health care facility in White Plains, in order to prevent patients from obtaining reproductive health care services on November 27, 2021. These defendants are affiliated with Red Rose Rescue, an anti-abortion activist group that has carried out similar unlawful actions all across the country. Indeed, the perpetrators convicted in White Plains have also apparently been involved in prior similar conduct—each has now been convicted multiple

times of such conduct, and has faced (or is currently facing) criminal charges in some of the following places: Nassau County, New York; Michigan; Pennsylvania; Washington, D.C.; and Virginia. Such activities can impede access to reproductive health care facilities not only for those seeking to obtain reproductive health care services, treatments, and/or procedures, but for providers of those services as well.

Your Committee finds that current law does not adequately protect reproductive health care facilities, and those who work in, seek access to, or obtain services from such facilities. Therefore, your Committee has determined that it is appropriate to enact legislation to prohibit interference with accessing reproductive health care facilities and obtaining reproductive health care services within the parameters established by precedent of the United States Supreme Court and the Second Circuit Court of Appeals, in order to: protect and promote the public health, safety, and welfare; ensure order; protect freedom of access to reproductive health care facilities; protect the freedom to obtain reproductive health care services; promote the free flow of traffic in the public way; advance medical privacy and the well-being of patients seeking access to reproductive health care facilities and obtaining reproductive health care services; and safeguard private property.

Your Committee is advised that this proposed Local Law is modeled upon various federal, state, and municipal laws, including the federal Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act of 1994 (“FACE”), 18 U.S.C. § 248; the New York State Clinic Access Act, N.Y. Penal L. §§ 240.70-240.71, N.Y. Civil Rights L. 79-m; the New York City Access to Reproductive Health Care Facilities Law, N.Y.C. Admin. Code §§ 10-1001, *et seq.*; and Colo. Rev. Stat. § 18-9-

122(3) (1999) (“Preventing passage to and from a health care facility – engaging in prohibited activities near facility”).

Your Committee is further advised that this proposed Local Law, if adopted, would protect persons seeking access to reproductive health care facilities and services both within facilities as well as outside said facilities. The Local Law would prohibit the use or threat of force against, physical obstruction or blocking of, or interference with any person seeking to access reproductive health care facilities or obtaining reproductive health care services. This proposed Local Law would also make it unlawful for any person to strike, shove, restrain, grab, kick, or otherwise subject to unwanted physical contact, another person seeking access to or exiting from, or obtaining services from, reproductive health care facilities. The proposed law also prohibits engaging in a course of conduct or repeatedly committing acts within 25 feet of the premises a reproductive health care facility when such behavior places another person in reasonable fear of physical harm, and prohibits following and harassing another person within 25 feet of the premises of a reproductive health care facility. As used in the relevant violation section, the meaning of “harass” is derived, in part, from New York State Penal Law § 240.26(3) and related interpretations in the case law. In addition, this Local Law will make it unlawful to physically damage or interfere with the operations of any reproductive health care facility. Further, the proposed Local Law provides that within a 100-foot radius from any door to a reproductive health care facility, no individual can, in the public way, knowingly approach within eight feet of another person, unless that other person consents, for the purpose of passing a leaflet, handbill, food, or liquid to; displaying a sign to; or engaging in oral protest, education,

or counseling with such other person. This provision applies equally to all, regardless of the content of their speech.

Your Committee notes that the proposed legislation will, if adopted, provide for both criminal penalties and civil remedies for violations of its provisions. Specifically, violation of this Local Law would be a misdemeanor, punishable by fines and/or imprisonment; and aggrieved persons would be authorized to institute civil actions for injunctive relief, damages, attorney's fees, and costs, in any court of competent jurisdiction, including state courts. In addition, the County Attorney would be authorized to commence civil actions for equitable relief.

Your Committee finds that this legislation would expressly ensure that First Amendment rights regarding freedom of speech are protected while, at the same time, provide relief for persons whose rights are interfered with in seeking or delivering reproductive health care services. Indeed, this Local Law does not prohibit conduct normally protected by the First Amendment. However, "true threats" and expression that takes place while trespassing on private property are not protected under the First Amendment. The right to engage in legitimate First Amendment activity does not shield individuals who trespass on private property or otherwise run afoul of the law. And to the extent any First Amendment conduct is affected at all, the law acts as a modest and reasonable time, place, and manner restriction that leaves ample room to communicate messages through speech and other protected First Amendment activity.

Finally, your Committee is informed that this Local Law does not meet the definition of an action under SEQRA and its implementing regulations 6 NYCRR Part 617. Please refer to the memorandum from the Department of Planning dated January 14, 2022, which is on file with the Clerk of the Board of Legislators.

Your Committee recommends adoption of this Local Law.

Dated: , 2022
White Plains, New York

COMMITTEE ON

SCM-05/16/2022

RESOLUTION NO. ____ – 2022

RESOLVED, that this Board hold a public hearing pursuant to Section 209.141(4) of the Laws of Westchester County on Local Law Intro. No. ____ - 2022, entitled “A Local Law adding Chapter 425 to the Laws of Westchester County to ensure safe access to reproductive health care facilities.” The public hearing will be held at __.m. on the ____ day of _____, 2022, in the Chambers of the Board of Legislators, 8th Floor, Michaelian Office Building, White Plains, New York. The Clerk of the Board shall cause notice of the time and date of such hearing to be published at least once in one or more newspapers published in the County of Westchester and selected by the Clerk of the Board for that purpose in the manner and time required by law.