



Written Testimony of

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for a Hearing on
Attorney General Nomination

Submitted to the
U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee
January 10, 2017

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10 January 2017

My name is Julie A. Burkhart, and I am the Founder and CEO of Trust Women Foundation, which operates reproductive health care clinics in Kansas and Oklahoma. Before founding Trust Women, I worked for eight years with Dr. George Tiller, who also had a health care facility that provided abortion care in Wichita, Kansas. I worked for him until he was assassinated the 31st of May 2009. I have also been the target of death threats, threats of bodily injury, bomb threats, harassment and other criminal activity for the work that I do and love.

I have spent the vast majority of my career, beginning while in the Midwest on summer breaks, working for women's reproductive access and rights. My induction into this line of work was during the 1991 Summer of Mercy, in which thousands of abortion opponents descended upon Wichita for months and blocked access to abortion clinics.

My personal and professional experience with anti-abortion crimes makes me deeply distressed about the nomination of Senator Sessions to become Attorney General. The Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act (FACE Act), which is enforced by the Attorney General and the Department of Justice, was enacted to protect the very rights to which Sen. Sessions has expressed long-standing opposition. Sen. Sessions holds views that are extremely hostile to reproductive rights and, as a result, I fear he may be uncommitted to punishing wrongdoers through the FACE Act and may not direct federal law enforcement to protect people like me when needed.

In 2001, while working with Dr. Tiller, I learned that there was a 10-year anniversary planned for the 1991 Summer of Mercy. While monitoring the activities around this event, we became aware of threatening language being used by its promoters, including Operation Rescue. For example, the organizers asserted they would "Finish the Job," a reference to the attempted assassination of Dr. Tiller in 1993. This not-so-veiled threat led to Dr. Tiller's protection by the U.S. Marshals Service, as ordered by the U.S. Attorney General at that time.

The rhetorical violence directed at Dr. Tiller characterized him as a pariah in a community and state that had been his family's home for decades. In my view, the rhetoric was a factor that ultimately led to his assassination.

On May 31, 2009, my boss was fatally shot in the side of the head by anti-abortion extremist Scott Roeder. He was serving as an usher during Sunday morning service at his church, and was wearing body armor, as he had been doing since 1998. In response, Attorney General Eric Holder directed the U.S. Marshals Service to offer protection to other abortion providers across the country.

After the horror of Dr. Tiller's assassination, I experienced anger, disbelief and dread. It was a time when I felt that my safety and security were an illusion. The fact that Dr. Tiller was providing a constitutionally protected medical service was no protection for his life. The atmospherics leading up to the assassination were violent and toxic. And rather than taking responsible actions to discourage violence, the state attorney general and groups including Operation Rescue contributed to a lethal environment. I felt that collectively, and with the leadership of a government official, he had been assassinated to serve the need to make an example, once again, of a physician who provides abortion care. Dr. Tiller's death caused great

disillusionment with the political process and with our difficulty, as a society, to have civil discourse about complex issues. It was a time of feeling that tyranny had won in our country.

After much reflection, I decided to found an organization that would be dedicated to providing abortion access in the very part of the country where Dr. Tiller had been so vehemently harassed and murdered. After anti-choice activists learned of my plans to open our clinic in Wichita, the harassment and intimidation began. After purchasing the clinic building, David Leach, affiliated with the Army of God (an extremist anti-choice group), had a 45-minute phone conversation (recorded by prison officials) with Scott Roeder, the man who murdered Dr. Tiller. In that conversation, Leach expressed that by opening the clinic I had put a target on my back, and Scott Roeder agreed. They insinuated that someone might murder me as well.

There are other instances of threats against my life, which include: anti-choice people coming to my home to protest, carrying signs that say things such as, "Prepare to Meet Thy God" and "Where is your church?"— a direct reference to where Dr. Tiller was assassinated.

I have had fliers distributed throughout my neighborhood, asking people to "bring me to God." I have also received threats against my life via the mail and email.

One of the most startling incidents occurred when Operation Rescue exploited false information they had received about our clinic, which, in turn, incited people to threaten my life. One such threat stated that someone should jump me and beat me to death. I was so struck with fear and a sense of helplessness and isolation that I purchased a firearm immediately after these threats began.

Additionally, anti-choice activists have disrupted our clinic operations numerous times and have placed undue stress on staff and patients. In November 2016, someone scaled our eight-foot wooden privacy fence and broke into the security vestibule and vandalized the clinic. Patients could not enter through the main entrance due to all of the broken glass and other debris. Employees were startled and unsettled by this act of violence, unsure as to what they may be walking in to. On another occasion, this past August, two bomb threats were made against the clinic. The person called twice and stated that he was going to blow the building up. The Wichita Police Department bomb squad, the U.S. Marshals Service and the FBI responded. People have trespassed onto the property during business hours, with the intent of disrupting our business. Protestors are at the clinic in Wichita five days a week for eight hours per day.

This past summer, the group Operation Save America staged the 25th Anniversary of the Summer of Mercy at the clinic. They also said that they were going to "finish the job" and defy the law due to their sole belief in God's law, which, in their view, trumps laws that govern civil society. The protest took place in July, but I began meeting with law enforcement as early as February of last year. Needless to say, we spent numerous hours planning for their demonstration. The City of Wichita took this seriously and prepared 100 officers who either stood watch or could respond to any acts of violence and aggression directed at the clinic or its staff. During the 10-day protest, I had four SWAT members, who were armed with automatic weapons, stationed right next door to my office. Even though the protest was peaceful, a fact for which I am grateful, it was unsettling to need so many law enforcement officers in and surrounding the clinic. It was a stark reminder that the business of reproductive health care is fraught with violence and danger.

I recount some of the security challenges I have faced because I depend on an engaged and committed Justice Department to protect the constitutional rights of patients who seek abortion care and medical professionals who provide that care. The Attorney General sets the agenda and tone of the Justice Department. Senator Sessions' record on abortion causes great concern that he will be indifferent or even hostile to women's health providers. We must not allow the leader of the Department of Justice to become an anti-choice operative with an agenda to undermine the constitutional right to safe abortion care.

Sincerely,



Julie A. Burkhart