

GOVERNOR PATRICK SIGNS BUFFER ZONE BILL

Increases safety of women seeking reproductive health services

BOSTON - Tuesday, November 13, 2007 -- Governor Deval Patrick today signed into law a bill expanding the protected area around reproductive health facilities in Massachusetts.

The legislation, supported by Senate President Therese Murray and Speaker of the House Salvatore DiMasi, establishes a fixed 35-foot buffer zone around the entrances and driveways of all reproductive health facilities in Massachusetts.

"Women in the Commonwealth have the right to obtain medical care free from violence, harassment or intimidation and this new law will guard that right," said Governor Patrick. "By widening the buffer zone around reproductive clinics we will protect patients from the harassment that so many have encountered as they seek care."

The prior buffer zone law, enacted in 2000, established a 6-foot "bubble zone" within an 18-foot buffer zone outside of reproductive health care facilities. A person could not knowingly approach another person within the 6-foot bubble zone unless he obtained that person's consent. That law had been difficult to enforce, however, because it was unclear how to prove that a patient did or did not give consent to a protester. Although violations of the law were reported to be frequent, there had not been a successful prosecution under the law since its enactment.

The new law attempts to remedy the problem by establishing a fixed 35-foot buffer zone around the entrances and driveways of all of the reproductive health facilities in the state, thereby ensuring safe access, without interfering with the ability of protestors to express themselves outside of the protected area.

"Patients have the right to seek medical care; health professionals have the right to assist their patients; and they both have the right to pursue care without being harassed, humiliated or threatened," Senate President Murray (D-Plymouth) said. "The new, improved Buffer Zone law is enforceable, common-sense legislation to protect the rights and well-being of women and their health care providers."

"Women seeking health services and the people who provide them should be free to do so without fear of assault, harassment or intimidation," said Speaker DiMasi (D-Boston). "This expanded buffer zone provides much-needed improvements to public safety and I commend everyone who worked so hard to see this bill become law."

"The Legislature's and Governor's quick work in passing the Buffer Zone Legislation addresses an important public safety issue," said Attorney General Martha Coakley. "Over the years, reproductive health care facilities have been the scene of mass demonstrations, congestion, blockades, and disturbances. This legislation will help to ensure greater safety on our public ways and sidewalks and

prevent violence, harassment and intimidation of women who are attempting to exercise their fundamental right to access healthcare."

"Planned Parenthood supports this new law because it will protect the privacy, dignity and safety of patients who are just trying to get to their doctor's appointments and staff who are just trying to do their jobs," said Dianne Luby, President/CEO Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts. "This is an important public safety measure and we commend Governor Patrick for signing it into law today."

The lead sponsors of the legislation - which had broad support in both the Senate and the House - were Senators Susan Fargo (D-Concord) and Harriette Chandler (D-Worcester), and Representatives Marty Walz (D-Boston) and Carl Sciortino (D-Medford).