

General Checklist for *Sidewalk Counselors/^Prayer Supporters

- *^ Pray before you arrive and put your trust in God.
- * ^Dress properly and be prepared for the weather so that it doesn't distract you.
- *^Be familiar with the abortion facility location you are covering. Know the property boundaries. Stay on the public sidewalk or other public areas. Be aware of any city ordinances aimed at our presence.
- *^Park on public streets and in public lots/ramps. Do not park in other area businesses' parking lots.
- * Make sure you have enough up-to-date brochures on hand and have them organized and ready to pass out quickly. (For example, have a Spanish brochure in your hand even if most of the brochures you distribute are in English.)
- * Arrive in plenty of time so that you do not miss any women and so that you can receive any important information from the previous sidewalk counselor.
- * ^Stay prayerful, peaceful, calm and non-violent while on the sidewalk.
- * Focus on meeting the woman's immediate needs and thus saving the baby's life.
- * ^Remember that abortion is never the solution. Speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).
- * Don't allow other pro-lifers, passersby or abortion employees or supporters to distract you from the life-saving work God has called you to do!
- * ^Respect others' prayer styles and sidewalk counseling techniques -----
- *But if these interfere with your life-saving efforts, gently offer correction. In return, be open to accepting correction from fellow sidewalk counselors.
- * Contact your local sidewalk counseling leaders if:
 - * a baby is saved!
 - * you need advice with a particular situation.
 - * you have problems with the security guards, abortion escorts or other abortion supporters.
 - * the police are called.
 - * an ambulance shows up.
 - * anything unusual happens.

Try not to get discouraged. Your prayers and presence are a powerful witness to the sanctity of human life. May God bless your efforts in this vital ministry on the sidewalks!

Reducing Physical and Legal Risks on the Sidewalk

Throughout the centuries, Christians have been persecuted for sharing the Gospel and attempting to do good. It is no different for those of us in the pro-life movement. But even though Pro-Life Action Ministries' staff and volunteers have logged hundreds of thousands of hours on the sidewalks since 1981, we have experienced relatively few frightening incidents. And even following the *Dobbs* decision, things have remained relatively calm on the sidewalks. But due to recent incidents involving the FBI, this is a good time to remind you of ways to try to reduce physical and legal risks while you are sidewalk counseling or praying outside abortion mills.

A sidewalk counselor in Philadelphia, Mark Houck, was recently arrested by multiple, heavily armed FBI agents in front of his wife and seven children, and charged with violating the federal FACE (Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances) Act. (Mark was acquitted of all charges in January 2023.) Shortly thereafter, two FBI agents questioned a prayer supporter outside the Planned Parenthood (PP) in St. Paul. To date, 23 pro-lifers have been arrested this year by the FBI or indicted by Biden's Department of Justice (DOJ), most due to participating in previous "rescues" at abortion centers in Tennessee or Washington, D.C. (where 115 aborted babies were retrieved this past March, including 5 late-term babies that may have been illegally killed). During these rescues, the pro-lifers peacefully blocked the entrances and/or entered the abortion centers to pray, sing and offer life-saving help to the abortion clients.

According to reports, if the pro-life activists are convicted of the FACE allegations, those charged with conspiracy could spend up to 11 years in prison and be fined up to \$260,000, while the others face up to a year in prison and fines up to \$10,000.

Mark Houck's case stemmed from an incident in 2021 in which he pushed a long-time abortion escort away from his 12-year-old son whom the escort was verbally abusing with vile comments. In St. Paul, the prayer supporter questioned had pushed a woman who had used a box-cutter to partially destroy a pro-life sign and was after the sign again. In these two cases, state criminal charges had all been dismissed against the pro-lifers before the FBI got involved. (The prayer supporter in St. Paul was NOT arrested by the FBI.)

The actions of the DOJ and the FBI in these cases are wildly disproportionate to the allegations and are seen by many as a political move by the Biden administration against people who oppose abortion. The federal FACE Act prohibits actions which *"by force or threat of force or by physical obstruction, intentionally injures, intimidates or interferes with or attempts to injure, intimidate or interfere with any person because that person is or has been . . . obtaining or providing reproductive health services."* The FACE Act also prohibits action which *"intentionally damages or destroys the property of a facility, or attempts to do so, because such facility provides reproductive health services, or intentionally damages or destroys the property of a place of religious worship"* and yet at least 156 pro-life pregnancy centers and churches have been vandalized or firebombed since May and no FBI arrests have been made in those cases.

We should NOT be intimidated by the government's current actions. The FACE Act does NOT prohibit First Amendment activities such as sidewalk counseling, picketing or praying outside abortion centers. But to help protect yourself and others, we ask you to adhere to the following:

- While you are praying or sidewalk counseling, do not physically impede those entering or leaving the abortion mill. Sidewalk counselors have the First Amendment right to approach cars and pedestrians

and to offer literature. People entering or leaving have the right to either accept or reject the literature and the right to stop and talk. Do not touch people or cars. (Some locations have ordinances that may somewhat regulate activity outside certain abortion mills; check with the local leaders of your sidewalk counseling organization.)

- Look around, be aware of what's happening at all times, and don't get caught up in idle chatter. (Actually, this is very important for sidewalk counseling itself so that you do not miss any abortion clients and so that you can keep spiritually focused.)
- Have your cell phone turned on and ready to videotape for legal purposes (and even just to calm down an aggressor). This is particularly important if you are a prayer supporter because the sidewalk counselors should be focusing on the abortion clients. Practice videotaping so that you are prepared to capture an incident at a moment's notice. Just videotape, do not narrate the incident. (If you are capturing an ambulance incident, stay out of the way of the paramedics.)
- If someone acts threateningly towards you (even if you don't particularly feel threatened), defend yourself by walking away and calling 911. Do not push or even touch the person. Clearly describe the incident to the dispatcher and ask for an officer to come to the scene. If the person is inside the abortion mill or in the vicinity, tell the dispatcher that the person is still there. If the person has left, tell the dispatcher that you are concerned that the person might return. Give the dispatcher the license plate number of the threatening person and try to get a photo, or at least a description, of the person. (This is important in case the driver is not the owner of the vehicle.) Then contact your local leaders. (You have a right to exercise your First Amendment liberties without aggression or undue interference. Remember, St. Paul used his rights as a Roman citizen to defend himself and his ministry. By calling 911, you are protecting not only yourself, but other sidewalk counselors and prayer supporters, and overall, your whole sidewalk counseling program and the lives you are trying to save.)
- If someone tries to steal your property, hold onto it firmly, but don't get into a physical struggle over it or you may be charged with assault. Calmly tell the person that he or she is on camera (perhaps even on the abortion mill's cameras), you have the license plate number (if applicable), and a police report will be filed. (You may be able to file such a report on-line.)
- If you are being accused in an incident, you do not have to give any information to a law enforcement agent (either FBI or local) without an attorney present. You can respectfully ask the officer for a business card and state that your attorney will be contacting him or her. Then contact your local pro-life leaders for legal assistance.
- If someone throws something suspicious towards you, don't touch it. Call 911.
- It is less likely that a person would cause trouble if there is a witness or two. Consider asking a friend or family member to go with you to pray and/or hold a sign if it looks as if you will be alone on the sidewalk.
- Write up an incident report as soon as you can while the details are still fresh in your mind and send it to your local leaders. Include the names of any witnesses.
- If a stranger offers you drinks or snacks, just politely thank them and decline.

- You are NOT obligated to talk to any passersby if you prefer not to, even if they try to engage you in a conversation. Obviously, it is good to share the pro-life message, but sometimes pro-abortion people can bait you into a discussion, which can then escalate into a fruitless argument and distract you from your purpose on the sidewalk. On a related note, if another sidewalk counselor has developed a good rapport with someone, do not insert yourself into the conversation unless invited!
- If a media person approaches you, ask for a business card. Even with that verification, you do not have to do an interview. But if you want to, explain that you are there to save lives, help pregnant women and pray. But, again, remember not to get distracted from your purpose of saving lives. Anything beyond these simple comments can be handled by your local pro-life leaders. Refer reporters to them for an official statement on current events. If the reporter or camera-person asks if you want to put a recording microphone on while you are sidewalk counseling, please decline. You don't want to do anything that discourages women from speaking with you and as you know, these conversations can become very personal, not something the woman would want aired on the evening news! Since you are in a public place, the media have the right to take photographs or videotape you, but you can decline to identify yourself.
- Do not talk about personal matters (especially identifying information) regarding yourself, other pro-lifers or the pregnant women you meet within earshot of abortion workers, escorts or pro-abortion demonstrators.

Finally, these words of Jesus apply to our ministry on the sidewalks: "Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves." (*Matthew 10:16*) St. Paul's words also apply: "For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control." (*2 Timothy 1:7*) Rely on God, be wise and be courageous! In the end, the question we need to ask ourselves is whether or not the lives and souls hanging in the balance at abortion mills are worth the (relatively small) risks we sidewalk counselors and prayer supporters take on. Yes, they are!

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