

U.S. MARSHALS DISPATCHED TO GUARD ABORTION CLINICS

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By Pierre Thomas
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The Justice Department has deployed U.S. marshals to abortion clinics in at least 12 communities around the country, including Washington and Falls Church, to prevent further violence and provide greater security for doctors, employees and patients.

The unusual preemptive move, following Friday's double murder at a Pensacola, Fla., clinic, came as abortion rights supporters demanded more federal involvement against what they see as a nationwide "terrorist" assault on physicians and centers that provide abortion. They compared recent acts of violence against the clinics to those against students and civil rights workers in the 1960s.

Abortion opponents, meanwhile, called for restraint, rejecting claims of conspiracy and complaining that they are victims of a shameful attempt to vilify an entire movement.

The department is "trying to take all prudent steps using all federal tools," Attorney General Janet Reno said yesterday, adding that violence against abortion clinics was emerging as a national problem of deep concern. Dozens of U.S. marshals in areas around the country are providing site security and in some places are providing door-to-door protection for doctors who have received threats, according to law enforcement and clinic sources, who noted that a law passed earlier this year gives federal authorities a more defined role in combating abortion clinic violence.

Reno declined to give specifics on the deployments, but law enforcement sources and abortion rights advocates said the focus is on clinics that have been the site of violent demonstrations. The list of clinic sites where marshals have been sent include Southeast Washington and Falls Church, as well as Pensacola and Melbourne, Fla.; Gulfport and Jackson, Miss.; Milwaukee; Des Moines; Fargo, N.D.; Wichita, Kan.; and Fort Wayne, Ind.

Department officials said they were concerned there might be "copycats" to the shotgun shooting in Pensacola that left an abortion clinic physician and his escort dead and another person injured. Federal law enforcement authorities also wanted to be prepared in the event that Friday's assault was the kick-off to a planned wave of violence aimed at clinics.

Justice also has established a task force including the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) with lawyers in the criminal and civil rights divisions to investigate whether attacks on abortion clinics are coordinated and whether federal statutes have been violated.

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Paul Hill, a onetime Presbyterian minister who advocated the killing of abortionists, has been charged in the Pensacola slayings. The killings came 16 months after the fatal shooting in the same city of abortion doctor David Gunn.

At the Commonwealth Women's Clinic in Falls Church yesterday, where presumed arsonists torched the doorway on Friday, two deputy marshals were parked in the front and back of the building just off Falls Church's main street. The clinic has been the target of repeated attacks since it opened in 1984. Vandals have painted swastikas and the words "baby killers" on the walls, scattered nails in the parking lot and shot pellets through the windows.

At Hillcrest Women's Surgi-Center clinic in the 3200 block of Pennsylvania Ave. SE, which is closed on Mondays, two U.S. marshals sat in a van with tinted windows in the parking lot. The marshals encountered no trouble and spent much of the afternoon directing prospective patients to a doctor's office across the street for more immediate care.

Over the past four years, police have arrested antiabortion protesters there at least four times. In 1993, during the week of President Clinton's inauguration, protesters used two cars with flattened tires, iron pipes, metal chains and a four-foot section of railroad track in an attempt to keep women from the clinic.

Statistics compiled by the ATF show at least 146 incidents of bombing or arson, or attempts of such, against clinics and other related sites since 1982. There were 25 incidents in 1984, but in most years the number of attacks or attempts has ranged from 10 to 15. In 1992 and 1993, a total of 36 incidents were recorded, with damage estimated at \$3.8 million.

National Abortion Federation records show 178 incidents of death threats, 347 cases of unlawful entry, 568 acts of vandalism and 35 incidents of burglary from 1977 to present.

As Justice Department officials met to consider their next step for increased security, abortion rights activists sought to increase pressure on federal law enforcement, staging a protest outside Justice headquarters and convening news conferences at a number of sites around the nation.

In a statement, Kim Gandy, executive vice president of the National Organization for Women, said, "For too long this nationwide campaign of violence and mayhem at clinics has gone unchecked by local and federal authorities." She called for a number of immediate steps, including:

- * The use of federal marshals for "as long as necessary" to protect those involved with abortion services.
- * Establishment of a multi-agency and department federal task force to investigate and prosecute acts of violence aimed at clinics and doctors.
- * Aggressive enforcement of the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act (FACE), which makes it a federal crime to physically block access to clinics, damage their property or injure or intimidate patients or staff. The law specifically covers death threats.

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"We want our people protected," Eleanor Smeal, president of the Fund for the Feminist Majority, said in a statement. "We passed {FACE} so that federal investigation of antiabortion violence will be undertaken and we want it now... . Hear us loud and clear -- we want help, we need help."

While abortion rights supporters were demanding help, antiabortion activists were attacking Reno's decision to dispatch marshals to assist with security, calling the act "McCarthy-like."

"This will chill legitimate and peaceful, constitutionally protected demonstrations at clinics," said the Rev. Patrick Mahoney, a spokesman for Operation Rescue, which has denounced the use of violence in the abortion debate. "Seeing federal marshals is an intimidating and provocative sight. The Clinton administration has crossed the line in the abortion debate. The blind scales of justice have been tipped to the pro-choice side. We don't think the federal government should protect locations where innocent children are killed."

The Supreme Court in January ruled that a tough federal anti-racketeering law could be used by abortion clinic operators to sue protesters who conspire to shut down clinics with violence or other wrongdoing. Under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO), protesters found guilty of criminal activities could be liable in civil lawsuits for triple money damages.

Congress fashioned FACE and approved it in May after a January 1993 Supreme Court ruling that states could not use an 1871 civil rights law, aimed originally at the Ku Klux Klan, to halt antiabortion protests.

Staff writers David Leonhardt and Robert O'Harrow Jr. and researcher Barbara J. Saffir contributed to this report.

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