



The League of Women Voters

Massachusetts

Testimony submitted by the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts
To the Joint Committee on the Judiciary
In support of S.2281 - An Act to promote public safety and protect access to reproductive health care facilities

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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts (LWVMA) was deeply disappointed by the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision in the case of *McCullen v. Coakley*, striking down as unconstitutional the Massachusetts law that establishes a 35-foot, content-neutral buffer zone around the entrance to reproductive health facilities. LWVMA joined an *amicus* brief in that case urging the Court to uphold the buffer zone law. In order to continue to protect the safety of individuals entering and exiting reproductive health facilities, LWVMA supports SD.2106 and urges the Joint Committee on the Judiciary to give the bill a favorable report.

LWVMA has a long history of supporting an individual's right to make informed reproductive decisions based on their own convictions and beliefs, beginning in 1972. LWVMA was a co-plaintiff with Planned Parenthood in a successful 1989 case against Operation Rescue for physically blocking abortion clinics. In that case, the Supreme Judicial Court ruled that blockades and harassment are not protected speech under the First Amendment and upheld an injunction against these activities.

In addition, LWVMA supports preventive measures to avoid unwanted pregnancies; access to family planning information, services and devices to people who want them; and distribution of information about contraception and sterilization, all of which are amongst the services provided by reproductive health care facilities.

LWVMA also strongly supports our constitutional rights to freedom of speech and peaceful assembly and is currently actively working with local Leagues and educational organizations developing practices to increase civil discourse in all areas of social policy conflict. We are also aware these rights are restricted in some ways, particularly when exercising these rights endangers the safety of others or restricts access of others to legally assemble.

According to a statement in the 7/15/14 *Worcester Telegram*, Harvard constitutional law professor Laurence Tribe said of S.2281: "It is a much more narrowly focused bill in terms of the conduct that it prohibits. It prohibits obstruction of access, which is not an expression of free speech."

LWVMA supports unimpeded, safe access to reproductive health care facilities and feels this bill provides that access. We urge the member of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary to give the bill a favorable report and work to quickly make it law in Massachusetts.