

On the St. Charles Banners (January 2016)

Once again, the citizens of New Orleans are being subjected to anti-choice rhetoric, in the form of “pro-life” banners, with the apparent sanction of the City. The banners along St. Charles Avenue, sponsored by Louisiana Right to Life and New Orleans Right to Life, are intended to shame and stigmatize women who choose abortion, and they assume that women who choose abortion have not come to this decision without careful consideration. The fact that the City approved these banners appears to be an endorsement of their message; however, 59% of Louisiana residents support *Roe vs. Wade*, the landmark 1973 Supreme Court case which legalized abortion.

In New Orleans, compared to the rest of Louisiana, far more children live in poverty, more die in infancy, and fewer have parents with sustainable employment; 44% of children live below the poverty level. The state has only one OB/GYN for every 13,000 women and 53% of single-parent households in Louisiana are headed by working mothers. Our lawmakers in Baton Rouge have consistently rejected providing age-appropriate sexual education for our young people, despite the fact that Louisiana ranks fifth in the nation for teen pregnancy rates.

It isn't enough that anti-choice organizations like Louisiana Right to Life have led efforts to shutter clinics and deny even the most basic reproductive health care to women across the state by implementing draconian restrictions on abortion; they must tug on emotional heartstrings while ignoring the harsh realities faced by women when confronted with an unplanned or unwanted pregnancy.

This is not the first time the City has blundered in its handling of the issue. In the summer of 2014, the Mayor's office issued a proclamation to welcome Operation Save America (OSA) to New Orleans. After over 1800 concerned citizens brought attention to the fact that OSA is on several national security watchlists for promoting the murder of physicians, the city rescinded the proclamation. Besides harassing women seeking abortion care at local clinics and picketing in front of a doctor's home, OSA invaded and disrupted church services at the First Universalist Unitarian Church. OSA is returning to New Orleans later this month to commemorate the upcoming *Roe* anniversary, an unwelcomed visit which undoubtedly will cost the City money and manpower and terrorize our community once again.

Anti-choice banners and billboards have become all too common in New Orleans. They are as offensive on Claiborne Avenue as they are on St. Charles, in the heat of the summer and at Mardi Gras. Given their inflammatory nature and incitement to violence, one would think that the City should demonstrate more careful consideration before banners like these are approved. Even implied approval gives them a legitimacy they do not deserve.

Read more: <http://www.theneworleansadvocate.com/news/14484534-185/anti-abortion-banners-on-city-lampposts-causing-a-flap>