



# PRO-CHOICE MINNESOTA NEWS

## Policy Update

### *Pro-Choice Victories in 2007*

The 2007 Legislative Session kicked off on January 3<sup>rd</sup> with high expectations for many progressive issues (such as the environment, GLBT rights, and Choice) that have been ignored for far too long. With an increase of 14 pro-choice votes in the House, and 5 pro-choice votes in the Senate, NARAL Pro-Choice Minnesota was looking forward to the 85<sup>th</sup> legislative session.

We entered the legislative session with several key legislative priorities:

#### **EC in the ER: The Compassionate Care for Sexual Assault Victims Act (HF. 1442/ SF. 1266)**

Thanks to the tireless efforts of supporters, legislators, and activists, survivors of sexual assault will soon have immediate access to the highest standard of medical care, including

emergency contraception and sexually transmitted infection treatment.

Following an overwhelming display of bipartisan support from the Minnesota House (105-27) and Senate (65-0) for the "Compassionate Care for Sexual Assault Victims Act," **Governor Pawlenty signed this vital legisla-**



**tion into law on May 4.** With Gov. Pawlenty's signature, Minnesota joins ten other states that recognize the right of all victims of sexual assault to receive the highest quality of health

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## **Volunteering as a Clinic Escort:** *Breaking Down Barriers to Access*

It is still dark outside as we approach the clinic, spotting one another heading to the entrance from different directions in the snow. No sooner do we converge than a van waiting on the street opens and three protesters jump out and set to work, propping up their enormous message boards emblazoned with garish, distorted images. We gather inside, check in with the day's coordinator, and replenish our cups with Peace Coffee before donning the bright vests that identify us as allies to the patients visiting the clinic this morning.

Besides facing difficult choices, significant financial, logistical barriers, and a hostile political environment, women often find physical impediments once they have reached the decision to have an abortion. With only seven clinics offering the service in the entire state of Minnesota, these sites become calculated targets for demonstrators and "sidewalk counselors" who attempt to interfere with women keeping their appointments. While the protesters are generally peaceful, their tactics can threaten and alarm women who are trying to access medical care.

"Don't kill your baby!" a woman screeches hysterically at a young couple heading to the clinic, while several men shuffle back and forth in front of an 8-foot tall religious icon, chanting Hail Mary in a dull monotone, voices rising on the phrase "fruit of thy

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care from any hospital they may turn to for help.

Please contact your legislators to thank them for their support!

NARAL Pro-Choice Minnesota wishes to express our deepest gratitude to all those volunteers, supporters, and legislators who have worked tirelessly over the past 7 years to bring all women this exciting victory. Our partners in the sexual assault support community have provided invaluable insight on the legislation, and testified on its behalf. The Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MNCASA), the Program for Aid to Victims of Sexual Assault of Duluth, and the SAFE Nurse Program at Fairview Ridges Hospital all contributed to this needed legislation.

### **Family Planning Clinics Funding Increase (HF. 298 / 184 SF.)**

Over 160 nonprofit family planning clinics in Minnesota (that served over 130,000 Minnesotans in 2005) are facing a financial crisis. The skyrocketing cost of birth control pills (up over 1,200% since December, 2006), record-low Medicaid reimbursement rates (.40 cents per dollar), and increasing costs of doing business have put tremendous strain on these clinics that serve as the

backbone for Minnesota's reproductive health care system.

To make matters worse, state funding to support these vital family planning clinics has reached a 15-year low. To underscore the importance of women's access to low-cost birth control in preventing unplanned pregnancies, Minnesota as seen a 44% increase in abortion rates among low-income women while the Pawlenty Administration has cut family planning funds to serve these women.

Working with our coalition partners Planned Parenthood of MN, ND, SD, Midwest Health Center for Women, and the SafPlan Coalition of family planning clinics, NARAL Pro-Choice Minnesota helped secure a \$2.3 million increase in family planning grants (for a total of \$9.6 million), a 25% increase in Medicaid reimbursement rates, and new policies that will allow family planning clinics to better serve their patients and reduce costs.

Minnesota family planning clinics are still facing great financial challenges. NARAL Pro-Choice Minnesota and our coalition partners will continue to advocate for these invaluable clinics that provide vital health care services to thousands of Minnesotans.

### **Comprehensive Family Life and Sexuality Education**

### **Act (HF. 615/SF. 588)**

In order for Minnesota's kids to grow up healthy and safe, they must have access to medically accurate, age-appropriate, comprehensive sexuality education. Study after study has found that young people who receive comprehensive lessons teaching both the value of abstinence **and** the facts about birth control, sexually transmitted infections, and reproduction are safer, healthier and better informed than their peers who receive only abstinence-only-until-marriage education.

As part of the Sex Ed for Life Coalition, co-convened by the Minnesota AIDS Project and the Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention and Parenting (MOAPPP), NARAL Pro-Choice Minnesota has worked to educate policymakers and advance legislation that addresses the importance of comprehensive sexuality education in providing young people with the tools they need to take care of themselves and make healthy decisions.

The Comprehensive Family Life and Sexuality Education Act had a momentous year. As part of the E-12 Education Omnibus bill, HF. 615/ SF. 588 survived until the very last day of the

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## **In their own words: volunteers talk about experiences as clinic escorts**

### **Why they got involved as escorts:**

I had seen firsthand how bad these protesters can be when I went with my friend to get her abortion. I knew I had to help other women in that situation hear comforting words. — *Katie Lapp-Welch*

I drove by the Highland Park Planned Parenthood Clinic one day several years ago and was shocked at the number of protesters. I realized that their presence there must be a painful element in what is already a difficult process for patients at the clinic. I think I decided that day I wanted to become involved as an escort, it just took me a while to turn that resolve into action. I thank NARAL for making possible my involvement as an escort, it is a wonderfully rewarding activity for me. — *Sidney Evans*

I heard about the volunteer opportunity through Macalester College's NARAL chapter, and decided to do it because I feel strongly that women have the right to make their choice—whatever it is—free of intimidation or

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womb.” Demonstrators thrust pamphlets and flyers upon the patients, and go so far as to offer their own adoption services. Not surprisingly, the pamphlets contain ludicrous claims and disturbing inaccuracies (one warns of the dangers of birth control, stating that the Pill results in “an early abortion”).

Presumably these protesters hope to dissuade patients from their decisions by offering some form of misguided compassion; instead, they stage a truly grotesque performance, day after day, to the dismay of neighbors, passersby, clinic staff who learn to endure this presence as an occupational hazard, and of course, the women who are arriving for an appointment, often under trying circumstances.

Today there are eight volunteer clinic escorts, just outnumbering the demonstrators who have since been joined by a carload of high school students. Pairing up strategically on the street corner and at the parking garage entrance to usher patients safely into the clinic, our calm and organized presence contrasts with the circus atmosphere of the protesters. “I’m with the clinic,” a volunteer says quietly to a mother and daughter as they step out of the ramp. “Would you like an escort?” The daughter nods, and two volunteers wearing bright vests walk on either side, shielding the pair from the protester’s shrieks. The high school students now appear embarrassed, looking at the ground as they whisper their prayers.

The volunteer escort program at Dr. Hanson’s in South Minneapolis is one of three such programs in the Twin Cities and was established in 2005 by Kate Hannaher, a longtime NARAL volunteer who has since joined NARAL’s board, and Nikki Madsen, who was at the time the Abortion Provider Expansion Project coordinator with Pro-Choice Resources and the NARAL Pro-Choice Minnesota Foundation. Meghan Kane, grassroots organizer with NARAL in 2005 and 2006, cultivated a sustainable program, recruiting an escort team, facilitating training sessions, and coordinating with the clinic. Similar programs are operated by Planned Parenthood in Saint Paul and at the Midwest Health Center for Women in downtown Minneapolis.

Currently over 70 volunteers have trained to assist women entering Dr. Hanson’s. Some come as often as once

or twice a month, and others come once or twice a year. They are trained to avoid conflict, focusing on the patients rather than the protesters, ready to alert building security or clinic staff should the situation call for it; while incidences of violence or confrontation are rare, occasionally a patient or her companions will retaliate against the protesters’ provocations, or an obstreperous protester will trespass onto clinic property in violation of the law.

After about an hour, the shift leader calls the front desk to see how many more patients to expect. When the last patient is safely inside, we pull off our vests and fill out the incident log: nothing out of the ordinary. A quiet day at the clinic is a good day at the clinic, and we turn in our vests and head home in the bright sunlight.

*Interested in learning how you can become a clinic escort?*

*Dr. Hanson’s: contact NARAL Pro-Choice Minnesota at (651) 602-7655 or email [volunteer@prochoiceminnesota.org](mailto:volunteer@prochoiceminnesota.org).*

*Midwest Health Center for Women in downtown Minneapolis: contact [counseling.mhcn@visi.com](mailto:counseling.mhcn@visi.com) for more information.*

*Planned Parenthood on Ford Parkway—call (612) 821-6113 or email [volunteers@ppmns.org](mailto:volunteers@ppmns.org).*



*Volunteer Clinic Escorts braving the February chill to help at Dr. Hanson’s clinic.*

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threat. – *Clara Hill*

#### **What they like about it:**

I am proud to be involved with a great organization that is working against obstacles to maintain our rights and make decisions about our own bodies. –

*Nancy Hudgins*

Sometimes, when a woman realizes what you're there for—that you're there to help her, that you're on her side—she'll give you a certain look: like she's recognizing a friend, or a lifeline. When I see that look I know I've made a person feel better when they really needed it. – *Hannah Stein*

I feel useful, even if it is a little thing (one or two hours), especially when we get feedback from the clinic staff saying that it helps. – *Robin Martinek*

Helping women feel as comfortable as possible on their way into the clinic and buffering them from the protestors' abuse. – *Abby Bar-Lev*

Clinic escorting is my favorite kind of volunteering because it's active and I know that it's such an important service to women. I look forward to it every time I sign up! – *Lila Baker*

#### **Appreciations for the clinic staff and physicians:**

Thank you very much for

your dedication to women's health and to your courage in the face of vicious opposition. You are contributing mightily to keeping America free, law abiding and healthy. My grandchildren are better off because of you. – *Bill Sorem*

Thank you so much for all you do! I really do appreciate you! – *Amanda Carnahan*

I wish I could think of a properly eloquent tribute to your service to women. Without you, the whole fight for the rights of women to control their own bodies would be useless. I admire your courage and willingness to devote so much of your life to the health and welfare of other women. You are heroes. – *Lisa Mills*

The services you provide are crucial for both these women and for America. I couldn't be prouder of the service you provide because it provides women a service that is very much needed and very crucial to personal privacy. Thank you for having the courage to do what you do. Your integrity is inspiring. – *Joe Campbell*

Thank you for showing up, day after day, and dealing with a commute unlike any other! – *Terry Solom*



*Winona Health Fair*

## Campus Update



*UMD "Safe Sex Fest"*

Our campus program had a successful first semester and this spring was also very positive. All 12 campuses kept extremely busy, planning events and tabling on choice related issues. There was a lot of excitement building on the campuses around Lobby

Day 2007. Here is a run-down of a few things that the campus groups did this year...

**Macalester** hosted Loretta Ross on February 20, 2007. The event was a great success with the students and community members that attended. Mac students were also tabling around Valentine's week giving out condoms, candy and information to students.

The **University of MN-Duluth** held their 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Safe Sex Fest throughout the week of Valentine's. Events included a 'Masturbation Discussion,' a speaker on 'Consent & Alcohol Use,' Safe Sex 101 workshop, 'The New Face of Contraception' - Important Info about Female/Male Reproductive Health Exams from Planned Parenthood Duluth, a 'Sex Toy Talk' and a speaker on 'Talking Sex and Safe Sex with Your Partner.' Throughout the week the group gave away over 300 Safe Sex Kits, which included condoms, lube, dental dams, candy, and info about the events. The Safe Sex Fest 2007 was also featured on the front page of the Duluth News Tribune Local Section.

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\* The Abortion Provider Expansion Project (APEP) is a collaborative program between the NARAL Pro-Choice Minnesota Foundation and Pro-Choice Resources.

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The Students for Reproductive Health at **St. Olaf** planned and co-sponsored a 'Vagina Carnival' in conjunction with the Vagina Monologues and several V-Day activities, which included a campus carnival. The group also gave out valentines of condoms and candy to the students and talked about the importance of the HPV vaccine. They also had the Reproductive Health Fair in March.



Carleton Carls for Choice

The Carls for Choice at **Carleton** held a panel discussion on "Abortion and Birth Control from Four Religious Perspectives." The panel consisted of four Carleton religion professors who were asked to speak about the theology and viewpoints of four different religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism) and their views on abortion and birth control.

The **University of MN** NARAL group, in conjunction with the University Pro-Choice Coalition (UPCC) and Pro-Choice Resources, held a fundraiser for the Hersey Fund at the Kitty Kat Club. The event was a huge success, raising over \$500 for the Hersey Fund. The UPCC along with the U of MN – NARAL group have been doing amazing choice coalition work on the U campus this year!

**Winona's** student group held a successful Roe v. Wade Anniversary Party. They showed the movie "The Mis-Education of Shelby Knox" with refreshments, activities and a discussion of abortion laws in Minnesota.

The **Moorhead** student group co-sponsored a Women's Studies panel on reproductive rights and invited Melissa Reed, NARAL's Political Director to be a panelist. The event kicked off the Moorhead group's Roe v. Wade Anniversary week, which included movie night, a feature article in the campus paper, a t-shirt sale, and a Plan B party.

## Quick Note

March 10, 2007 was National Day of Appreciation for Abortion Providers. In addition to the dedicated and compassionate physicians, nurses, and clinic staff who make choice a reality for women in our state, NARAL Pro-Choice Minnesota would like to recognize the volunteer clinic escorts for their unwavering support of women. Thanks, too, to Peace Coffee for providing coffee to our volunteer corps on those cold mornings, and for the assistance and backing from Plant Management and Security at the Phillips Eye Institute.

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legislative session. In last minute negotiations with the Governor, the policy language regarding comprehensive sexuality education was removed from the bill. Despite this setback, this important legislation garnered widespread, bipartisan support and we expect continued success in the future.

Abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, like the state-funded ENABL program (Education Now and Babies Later), have been proven time and again to be ineffective, and many actually increase risk by withholding vital information young people need to pro-

tect themselves from unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. The Minnesota Department of Health's own evaluation of ENABL found it to be ineffective in delaying the onset of sexual activity, ineffective at decreasing the number of sexual partners, and ineffective at increasing parent-child connectedness. With one in four of the state's sexually active youth contracting an STI each year, Minnesota should instead be investing its resources in providing our young people with comprehensive education that teaches them the knowledge and skills they need to grow into healthy, safe, and responsible adults.

Fortunately, the Minnesota ENABL funding was not renewed for the upcoming years

and the program was defunded entirely in this legislative session. Minnesota joins an ever-growing number of states that are ending their failed abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. We hope such harmful programs will soon be replaced with comprehensive, medically accurate sexual



UMD Safe Sex Fest

health education programs that provide Minnesota's youth with the knowledge and skills they need to grow-up healthy, safe, and informed.



Loretta Ross (center) with members and alumna of NARAL Pro-Choice Macalester. From left to right, Anava Wren, Jennie Vail, Loretta Ross, Beth Orlikowski, and Kelly Seacrest.

## Loretta Ross Visits Macalester College

*"Can We Affirm that Abortion is a Human Right?"*

On February 21<sup>st</sup>, student activists from NARAL Pro-Choice Macalester hosted Loretta Ross, founder of SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective, co-director of the 2004 March for Women's Lives, and a nationally recognized leader in the burgeoning reproductive justice movement.

"Can we affirm that abortion is a human right?" Ms. Ross urged, appealing to the audience of women and men as she outlined eight categories codified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

SisterSong was formed, in part, to confront concerns overlooked by affiliates in the reproductive rights movement. SisterSong comprises organizations and individuals from communities of color, collectively resisting strategies of population control: it is a fight both to limit family size *and* to bear the number of children desired, under the conditions of one's choosing, and, importantly, a fight to retain the right to parent one's children.

Beth Orlikowski, this year's chair of NARAL Pro-Choice Macalester, invited Ms. Ross after members saw her last spring in Pro-Choice Resources' Race and Reproductive Health Speaker Series. She hopes that holding events such as these will help activate and broaden the involvement of Macalester's pro-choice community.

The NARAL Pro-Choice Minnesota Foundation was proud to co-sponsor Loretta Ross' recent visit. For more information about Loretta Ross and the SisterSong collective, please see [www.SisterSong.net](http://www.SisterSong.net). All are welcome at this year's national conference, "Let's Talk About Sex!" in Chicago from May 31 to June 3.