

Rally for reproductive rights held outside clinic

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Written by

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People at the Wake Up Mississippi Support Our Clinic rally listen to a speaker Saturday in the parking lot of the Women's Health Organization clinic on N. State Street in Jackson. / Rick Guy/The Clarion-Ledger

More than 100 women's reproductive rights supporters on Saturday stood in solidarity with Jackson Women's Health Organization with a rally in advance of a trial next spring.

The rally outside the bright pink clinic was planned by grassroots organizations Wake Up Mississippi, the Hell No Campaign, JWHO clinic defenders and Mississippi Now, along with StopPatriarchy.org and Abortion Rights Freedom Riders.

"We appreciate this clinic helping women receive abortions and reproductive health care," said Michelle Colon, lead organizer for the Hell No Campaign. "These are local, Mississippi pro-choice people who support safe and legal access to abortion."

The rally drew clinic defenders from Houston, Texas, and Louisville, Ky., and supporters from across Mississippi. Sunsara Taylor of StopPatriarchy.org and the Abortion Rights Freedom Ride said five states including Mississippi have only one abortion provider left.



“That’s why we did the Abortion Rights Freedom Ride. We went through 15 states, we’ve been on the road for a month, standing up for women’s right to abortion on demand, without apology,” Taylor said.

The Jackson clinic remains open through a court order, and the clinic will challenge legislation requiring abortion providers to have admitting privileges to local hospitals in a trial set for March 2014.

The clinic staff gave no comments at the rally, but owner Diane Derzis said months ago that requests for privileges have been denied. U.S. District Judge Daniel P. Jordan allowed the new law to take effect but blocked the state from imposing penalties while the clinic seeks admitting privileges.

Laurie Bertram Roberts, president of Mississippi Now, said women can no longer be silent in the fight for reproductive rights.

“If we don’t do what we’re supposed to do to protect the rights of women and young women in this country and in this state, people will die, women will die and we will lose a constitutional right,” Roberts said. “In Mississippi, guns are more protected than your uterus.”

Early on, a few anti-abortion activists — including frequent protestor Roy McMillan — quietly appeared across the street. McMillan left the area and one protestor with a sign “Killing babies today” walked around, leaving after Jackson police were called as a precaution.

The rally was filmed by Washington, D.C.’s Alliance for Justice’s documentary on reproductive rights and current legislative threats to abortion rights.

“The purpose of the film is to raise awareness and promote a model for activism,” said communications director Kevin Fry. “What’s happening in Mississippi is happening in other states across the country.”

Statements in solidarity were read at the rally, including one from actor Mark Ruffalo, whose mother was forced to have an illegal abortion as a young woman.

“I don’t want to turn back the hands of time to when women shuttled across state lines in the thick of the night to resolve an unwanted pregnancy, in a cheap hotel room just south of the state line,” Ruffalo wrote.

- (comment – name removed for privacy)Brandon, Mississippi

I was across the street at Roosters when this "rally" happened. It lasted about 3 minutes. They got lined up with thier signs and chanted a few things long enough to get on camera and talk to reporters. And then they left. It was a media event and nothing more.

Name removed for privacy Jackson, Mississippi

Does not surprise me... They are filming the article says ... So they need to make it look like a bigger deal than it is!!!