

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**01/07/2015**

### **A vindication of the right to protest for Bernadette Smyth**

The national pro-life charity LIFE welcomes the overturning of Precious Life Director Bernadette Smyth's conviction today.

Today's ruling is a vindication of the right to peaceful protest against abortion. The appeal judge made clear that there was no real evidence that Ms Smyth's actions had crossed the line into illegality.

There is a real movement afoot in some quarters to severely restrict the right to peaceful, respectful protest by pro-lifers. We see this, for example, in the Back Off! campaign that made a lot of noise a few months ago, seeking to paint participants in pro-life vigils as potentially violent and disruptive. This is clearly ludicrous. The fact is that the police already have considerable powers to prevent street harassment. Section 5 of the 1986 Public Order Act prohibits 'threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour, or disorderly behaviour'. It is a criminal offence if anyone 'displays any writing, sign or other visible representation which is threatening, abusive or insulting, within the hearing or sight of a person likely to be caused harassment, alarm or distress thereby'.

If people are acting badly outside abortion clinics, the police and the criminal justice system can deal with it through the existing law. There is no need for further restrictions on peaceful protests and vigils, except as a way of intimidating and silencing pro-life voices.

It's hard not to see the Back Off campaign as an attempt by pro-abortionists and their allies at the highest levels of politics and the health establishment to distract attention from the many scandals and shocking revelations about the abortion industry in the last year or so.

As an organisation, LIFE does not take part in protests or prayer vigils at abortion clinics (we also never display graphic images of abortion). However, we do support the right of other groups to take part in protests and vigils if they wish. The right to free expression, and free protest, is deeply important. These protests should be peaceful and orderly and should not involve harassment of any kind. We are opposed to any physical harassment of women or any attempt to obstruct women from going into an abortion clinic. If genuine harassment is occurring, then it should be prevented. No pro-lifer should behave aggressively towards women. It goes against all LIFE's principles to do so. But it is important that we are clear about what actually counts as harassment.

The offer of a non-explicit leaflet outlining alternatives to abortion, or asking politely whether she would like to discuss her decision with a counsellor, is not harassment, and it would be illogical and sinister to treat it as such.

**END**

**For further media comment please call the LIFE Media Hotline on 07867 744502**

**LIFE is a pro-life charity that supports anyone facing a crisis pregnancy, pregnancy loss or after an abortion, and strives to engage, inspire and inform the next generation.**