

Woman Arrested for Silent Prayer at UK Abortion Clinics Gets Police Apology

Vaughan-Spruce is the director of March for Life UK and helps support women in crisis pregnancies. She has regularly prayed near abortion clinics for 20 years.



“This isn’t 1984, but 2023—I should never have been arrested or investigated simply for the thoughts I held in my own mind,” Isabel Vaughan-Spruce, who was arrested for praying outside of an abortion clinic, said Sept. 22, 2023. (photo: Courtesy photo / ADF UK)

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Isabel Vaughan-Spruce, the woman twice arrested for silent prayer outside U.K. abortion clinics, has received a police apology and confirmation that she will not face charges for violating a local “buffer zone” protection order.

Though Vaughan-Spruce said she would return to the clinic to pray, she warned that her treatment has implications for the future of basic freedoms in the U.K.

“This isn’t 1984, but 2023 — I should never have been arrested or investigated simply for the thoughts I held in my own mind,” Vaughan-Spruce said, alluding to George Orwell’s dystopian novel. “Silent prayer is never criminal,” she said in a Sept. 22 statement.

On March 6, Vaughan-Spruce was arrested for praying in a “buffer zone” outside an abortion clinic on Station Road, Birmingham. Local authorities had declared a Public Space Protection Order near the clinic, using a legal mechanism intended to prevent antisocial behavior.

Prohibited activities in this zone include approval or disapproval of abortion through protest, which “includes but is not limited to graphic, verbal, or written means, prayer, or counseling.” The order also bars interference, intimidation, or harassment, recording or photographic clinic staff or clients, and the display of any text or imagery related to abortion.

Vaughan-Spruce was previously arrested Dec. 6, 2022, for silent prayer outside the same abortion facility, which was closed at the time. In February, the Birmingham Magistrates’ Court acquitted her of all charges related to the first case.



Isabel Spruce-Vaughn was arrested twice for praying outside abortion clinics. Credit: ADF UK

West Midlands police apologized to Vaughan-Spruce for taking so long to close her second case. They said there would be no further investigation and no further action taken.

Vaughan-Spruce welcomed the end of the investigation and the police apology but said her case highlights “the extremely harmful implications” of what happened to her.

“What happened to me signals to others that they too could face arrest, interrogation, investigation, and potential prosecution if caught exercising their basic freedom of thought,” she said.

Police initially told Vaughan-Spruce the delay was due to her case being referred to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for charges, though CPS has denied this claim, according to ADF UK. CPS had no information about her second case and said police should not refer such cases to the CPS when they have the power to decide on charges themselves.

Vaughan-Spruce is the director of March for Life UK and helps support women in crisis pregnancies. She has regularly prayed near abortion clinics for 20 years.

“Now that authorities have twice settled on the conclusion that silent prayer is not a crime — a conclusion also reached by the Home Secretary last week — I am thankful to resume my practice of praying silently for women in crisis pregnancies,” she said.

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