

Abortion clinic payout woman shocked at prayer arrest

21 August 2024

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ADF UK

Isabel Vaughan-Spruce said she had helped women who wanted to avoid abortion but faced pressure from a partner or money worries

A woman arrested after praying outside an abortion clinic has received a payout from police.

Isabel Vaughan-Spruce from Worcestershire was accused of breaching a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) outside the clinic in Kings Norton, Birmingham, but the charges were dropped last year.

She said her aim was to be "a peaceful and prayerful presence for women in crisis pregnancies".

She received £13,000 from West Midlands Police, which said it settled her civil claim "without any admission of liability", adding the city council brought in the PSPO to deter protesters.

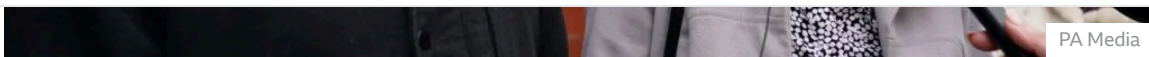

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The charges were dropped against Father Sean Gough and Isabel Vaughan-Spruce last year

Ms Vaughan-Spruce is co-director of March for Life UK, an anti-abortion campaign group.

She claimed the police actions breached her human rights.

The campaigner told the BBC that as a "crisis pregnancy support volunteer" for 20 years, she had offered leaflets about charitable services available to women who would rather avoid abortion.

But she added she "found it particularly shocking" to be accused of "intimidating" action, as she "would condemn anyone who tries to intimidate or harass women".

In addition, when she was arrested in November 2022, the centre was shut with no service users present, she said.

"I was there simply to pray for women facing very difficult situations and decisions. Prayer isn't a crime. Neither is standing," she said.

Ms Vaughan-Spruce highlighted a survey **about reproductive coercion**, commissioned by the BBC, in which 15% of the 1,000 UK women surveyed said they had experienced pressure to terminate a pregnancy.

She said women could face pressure from a partner or economic pressure, adding over the years she had helped dozens of women "who wanted to have other options than abortions available to them".

The Home Office said: "Protecting women's rights is a priority for this government, and it is vital anyone exercising their legal right to access abortion services is free from harassment and intimidation."

'Peaceful and prayerful'

Father Sean Gough, a Catholic priest from Wolverhampton, also saw charges claiming he intimidated service users near the abortion clinic **dropped in February 2023**.

Prosecutor Ekene Pruce said both cases were judged not to meet the full code test. This assesses whether prosecutions are in the public interest and if there is sufficient evidence.

Ms Vaughan-Spruce received legal support from Alliance Defending Freedom UK (ADF), part of a US-based conservative Christian legal advocacy group, to fight her civil case.

In the US, Alliance Defending Freedom appealed against a lower court ruling which led to the Arizona Supreme Court ruling the state can enforce a 160-year-old near-total ban on abortion.

However, Ms Vaugh-Spruce told the BBC her focus outside the clinic in Birmingham "is not on legal change – but on being a peaceful and prayerful presence for women in crisis pregnancies".

Buffer zone legislation

ADF UK has opposed government plans for buffer zones near abortion clinics which it said would mean a "further crackdown on silent prayer" and breach a protected right under the Human Rights Act 1998.

The Home Office said it had not yet set out the guidance but was "committed to introducing buffer zones around abortion clinics as soon as possible".

The Daily Telegraph reported last week it understood the Home Office was considering banning silent prayer within the 150m zones.

Meanwhile, Birmingham City Council confirmed its PSPO was still being enforced.

West Midlands Police stated it was brought in in 2022 "to deter protesters and protect the public from intimidation that their presence causes following numerous complaints from residents".

And regarding Ms Vaughan-Spruce's payment, the force added: "A member of the public who had been arrested on suspicion of breaching the PSPO subsequently made a civil claim for unlawful arrest, assault and a breach of their human rights.

"We have now settled that claim without any admission of liability."

It said it was continuing to liaise with the council and listen to the feedback from residents in the area.

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