

New York's sidewalks will never be the same

On the fourth anniversary of Pope John Paul II's death, the New York City Council passed its Clinic Access Bill. Mayor Michael Bloomberg will sign it into law shortly, empowering police to arrest sidewalk counselors who help literally thousands of pregnant teens and women "choose life."

"A city needs a soul if it is to become a true home for human beings," John Paul famously proclaimed in Shea Stadium 30 years ago. But the legislation — backed by all the usual pro-abortion-on-demand suspects — is soulless.

It lowers standards of evidence regarding alleged harassment — the patient need not testify — and imposes steep fines and stiff prison sentences.

Speaker Christine Quinn insisted her bill is not an "attack on free speech" and "would do nothing to limit rights of protesters." But, divining exactly what free speech it allows isn't easy.

Basically, if you're a loud protester with signs, your speech should be protected. If you're a quiet, up-close sidewalk counselor, better think twice.

Chris Slattery of Expectant Mother Care, one of the main targets, says her group's goal is to gently help "often-misguided girls and women ... with whatever they need to give them a true alternative to abortion."

Protected free speech? Apparently not, according to Joan Malin, chief executive officer of Planned Parenthood of New York City, who char-

acterized such gentleness as "terrorizing innocent Americans."

At a hearing convened before the bill's passage, attendees heard a New York City official assure EMC and others they are free to offer counseling within 15 feet of an abortion clinic. Later on, abortion providers asserted that's just what the bill forbids.

No city police officer testified for, though one testified against, the bill; neither did any clients, who've allegedly been "terrorized" — not even anonymously. However, six of EMC's "turnarounds" — five pregnant, one with her "saved" newborn — testified how appreciative they were for the counselors' help.

Of course, blocking, impeding, harassing or otherwise intimidating clients approaching an abortion clinic is illegal and always has been.

Fast-forward and follow the money lost from "turnarounds."

The unpersuadables, Slattery said, are easy to spot. They brush off the literature.

But it's the ambivalent ones — often victims of unreported statutory rape being forced to get an abortion — who are most receptive and freely stop to listen.

With this legislation, the sidewalks of New York — the city's "soul" — will never be the same.

Mary Claire Kendall served as special assistant to the assistant secretary for health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, from 1989 to 1993.

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COMMENTARY

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New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg will sign into law the Clinic Access Bill, allowing police to arrest sidewalk counselors in front of abortion clinics.