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Lawsuit Filed on Eve of One-Year Anniversary of Supreme Court *Dobbs* Ruling: Springfield Police Department Shows Pattern of Violence Towards First Amendment Activities

Eugene, OR—On the eve of the one-year anniversary of the Supreme Court’s *Dobbs* decision striking down *Roe v. Wade*, the Civil Liberties Defense Center has filed a federal lawsuit challenging police overreaction to a protest outside of an anti-abortion “pregnancy counseling” center in the wake of that decision. Such centers are associated with a vast network of organizations sometimes called pregnancy centers (CPCs) and often mislead the public, as these centers do not provide comprehensive reproductive health care.

The protest was part of a nationwide “night of rage,” where pro-choice activists expressed their anger and called on lawmakers to do more to preserve reproductive healthcare. “In the book *The Punishings*, the author H.R. Bellicosa wrote ‘Abortion is health care. Abortion is freedom. Abortion is bodily autonomy. A country without this human right is not a free country,’ and that resonates with me,” said Amanda Becker-Henske, who brought the lawsuit forward.

Ms. Becker-Henske was serving as a medic and observer on June 24, 2022, during the protest, when Eugene Police Department (EPD) requested support from nearby Springfield Police Department (SPD). SPD Officer Brian Bragg was among those who showed up and began yelling at and assaulting protesters and bystanders. Officer Bragg is named in another lawsuit for assaulting peaceful protestors in July 2020.

Ms. Becker-Henske is a 42-year-old, longstanding medical worker with experience providing medic care at protests. Acting with professionalism, she spoke with an EPD sergeant, who directed her where to stand while she observed and remained on standby should medical assistance be needed. She remained kitty-corner from the anti-abortion center, wearing clear markings that identified her role as a medic.

As soon as Springfield Police arrived, they escalated with physical force and created a chaotic scene. “The simple fact that SPD has a history of being physically violent with people exercising

their First Amendment rights needs to be rectified,” said Ms. Becker-Henske. Her attorney, Marianne Dugan, said that “SPD showed up and began to shove people off sidewalks, despite clear instructions from EDP to remain on the sidewalks,” creating a chaotic situation that was escalatory.

Officer Bragg deployed aggressive and violent tactics, focusing his ire on Ms. Becker-Henske, who was standing by and complying with directions from EPD. Amid confusing directions to move off of the sidewalk as well as get on the sidewalk, Officer Bragg shoved his baton into Ms. Becker-Henske’s sternum, hard, and also hit her lip.

Officer Bragg took these aggressive tactics, despite the fact that Ms. Becker-Henske was standing far apart from the protesters, observing peacefully and standing by for medical care. At no time was Ms. Becker-Henske arrested, told she was under arrest, or charged with a crime.

Marianne Dugan explained “Our complaint names both Officer Bragg and the City of Springfield, because the pattern of abuses exhibited by Bragg and other SPD officers indicates that the City is a motivating force behind such behavior, either through active training and guidance, or turning a blind eye, and ratifying its officers’ misbehaviors.” The lawsuit alleges excessive force, deliberate indifference to health and safety, and First Amendment retaliation, all in violation of the U.S. Constitution. “We look forward to obtaining discovery in this case regarding the City of Springfield’s approach to mass unrest during these years following the George Floyd uprisings, when so many municipalities are claiming they have reformed their ways,” Dugan concluded.