

After furor, Komen backs off policy

Planned Parenthood's local chapter says it has had outpouring of support

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Local Planned Parenthood officials say they have two big reasons to celebrate.

The first is Friday's announcement that the Susan G. Komen for the Cure breast-cancer charity is reversing its decision to

stop giving money to Planned Parenthood affiliates. The about-face came after three days of virulent criticism that jeopardized Komen's iconic image.

The second cause for celebration is the newly expanded list of donors and volunteers Planned Parenthood of Central Texas now has, community affairs director Felicia Goodman said.

Dismay about Komen's initial decision triggered an outpouring of financial and moral support locally, she said.

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Planned Parenthood official Felicia Chase Goodman and Washington Post columnist Kathleen Parker discuss the Komen controversy.

"People we've never heard from before came out of the woodwork, on email and on Facebook, to say, 'This is outrageous,'" Goodman said. "It just shows how this community cares about women.

Extremists didn't win on this one. It's hugely rewarding."

Earlier this week, Komen revealed it had adopted a policy that would exclude Planned Parenthood from future grants that provide breast-cancer screenings for low-income women. The policy said grants could not be given to any group under investigation by local, state or federal authorities.

That necessitated a cutoff in

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funding to Planned Parenthood, Komen said, because a Florida congressman this fall launched a probe into whether the group improperly spent public money on abortions.

On Friday, Komen released a statement saying it would change the policy "to make clear that disqualifying investigations must be criminal and conclusive in nature and not political." Planned Parenthood continues to be eligible for funding, the group said.

"We want to apologize to the American public for recent decisions that cast doubt upon our commitment to our mission of saving women's lives," the statement said. "... We urge everyone who has participated in this conversation across the country over the last few days to help us move past this issue. We do not want our mission marred or affected by politics — anyone's politics."

Many Komen affiliates openly rebelled against the decision to cut the funding, which totaled \$680,000 last year. That money went to 19 Planned Parenthood af-

filiates, including Waco's. Its grant this year is nearly \$50,000.

In addition, Komen was inundated with negative comments via email, on Twitter and on its Facebook page. Many of the messages conveyed a determination to halt gifts to Komen, organizer of the popular Race for the Cure events.

Donation boost

Meanwhile, Planned Parenthood reported more than \$3 million in donations between Tuesday evening and Friday afternoon, spurred by the Komen decision. The organization has pledged to use those funds to expand its breast health services.

"We are enormously grateful that the Komen Foundation clarified its grant-making criteria," Planned Parenthood president Cecile Richards said. "What these past few days have demonstrated is the deep resolve all Americans share in the fight against cancer."

Through the Komen grants, Planned Parenthood said it provided nearly 170,000 clinical breast exams and more than 6,400 mammogram referrals during the past five years.

Locally, Komen money has helped Planned Parenthood

offer low-income clients vouchers for services at local breast health centers.

The money also has served as the matching funds the Waco affiliate needs to participate in the state's breast and cervical cancer screening program. It allows low-income women with cancer to enroll in Medicaid so they can receive state-funded treatment.

Together, the two programs paid for 609 women to receive screening mammograms in 2010, Goodman has said. They also paid for follow-up services given to 292 women whose screenings found potential problems.

Additionally, 24 women diagnosed were enrolled in Medicaid for cancer treatment.

Goodman said Friday that she did not have an exact total for local donations triggered by the Komen controversy. But giving has been "in the multiple thousands," she said.

"We're telling our great story of what we do and people are getting it," Goodman said. "Moving forward, we will stay in touch with (new sup-



Goodman

porters) ... and try to engage more people in the community in what we do."

Goodman emphasized that local Planned Parenthood officials don't have animosity toward Komen's Central Texas affiliate, based in Waco.

Officials there could not be reached for comment Friday. A phone message said the office was closed for staff training.

Pro-Life Waco leader

John Pisciotta, head of a local anti-abortion group that applauded Komen's initial funding cutoff, said he was disappointed by the reversal.

The group, Pro-Life Waco, called for the local Komen chapter to rescind this year's grant to Planned Parenthood, even though it took effect Jan. 1.

Still, Pisciotta said the controversy has helped accomplish one of his group's goals — alerting the public to Komen's partnership with Planned Parenthood.

For years, anti-abortion activists both locally and nationally have urged Komen to part ways with the family planning organization.

"We could not have done more to expose that relationship than the last three days,"

Pisciotta said. "The whole world knows, if it didn't know before."

Nancy Goodnight, who has been on the local Komen board and served as race chairwoman, said it's true Komen's partnership with Planned Parenthood results in some people not donating to the breast-cancer charity. She said she respects the views of such people, as well as those who think abortion should be legal.

But to Goodnight, Komen's grants to Planned Parenthood have nothing to do with the abortion issue. She said she is glad Komen reversed its decision.

"To me, nothing about this is pro-life or pro-choice at all," Goodnight said. "This is about women needing health care, indigent women who have no other place to go."

The Associated Press contributed to this story.



Pisciotta