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# Waco to weigh local Grace Act

## Palmer calls for talk on deemphasizing abortion law enforcement

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A new pro choice group is asking Waco officials to instruct local law enforcement to make enforcing state abortion laws their lowest priority, a possibility the Waco City Council plans to discuss at a future meeting.

Waco City Council Member Kelly Palmer said she knew she was breaking with precedent when she called for the council to consider an ordinance de-prioritizing local enforcement of abortion limits, but that the issue has a tangible effect on the lives of her constituents in District 4 as well as her own life.

"There has been such an outpouring of gratitude from residents, whether those are health care professionals or social service professionals or students or teachers that feel grateful that someone is engaging on this local level," Palmer said.

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## Abortion

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The Austin City Council recently passed the Guarding the Right to Abortion Care for Everyone Act, or Grace Act. Since then the city of Denton has adopted a similar resolution and Dallas's city council is discussing the possibility. Discussion of a potential local version of the act, or other type of limit on local enforcement of abortion restrictions, will be placed on a city council agenda.

Waco Mayor Dillon Meek said the council will thoughtfully consider people's concerns during the hearing of visitors portion of council meetings, but he does not think discussing abortion law is under the city's purview. Meek did not give specific reasons why.

One of Pro-Choice Waco's organizers, Jessica Macias, said the group has been organizing demonstrations and is pushing measures including a local version of the Grace Act in the short term. In the long term, the group's 500 or so McLennan County members may vote on

whether to become a political action committee, providing financial backing to Texas political candidates who support legal access to abortions in the state.

One of the group's organizers, Cassie Robertson, a disabled veteran, said she was prohibited from protesting until recently, when she ended a seven-year Army career as a combat medic that included nine months in Afghanistan, and moved from Fort Hood to Waco.

"Many in my friend group felt similarly, had strong feelings about losing what we consider to be a human right," Robertson said.

She said her biggest priority is to get the city council to consider measures like the Grace Act or other measures that de-prioritize enforcement of the state's abortion ban against people seeking abortions and against doctors looking to prescribe medications that can be used to induce abortions in certain circumstances, including the methotrexate she takes for arthritis, or prescribe medically necessary abortions. "It's torture," Robertson said.

"That's psychological, mental, emotional, physical torture. These women are being held to the brink of death, before they're allowed to have a medically necessary abortion."

Pro-Life Waco Director John Pisciotta said he expects the community to react strongly and attend the next council meeting in larger numbers.

"There are many people like myself that find it an abomination that this is even mentioned at the city council," Pisciotta said. "And of course we're a divided country, we're a divided city. There are people in our city that love it, that just think it's great that we can maybe defend abortion by such a maneuver."

Emma Church, a local clinical psychologist who specializes in post-traumatic stress disorder, spoke at the July 19 city council meeting. She warned listeners she would be discussing sexual assault and domestic violence. Church said abortion is a mental health issue, and she is especially worried for patients suffering in intimate partner violence, and for transgender and nonbinary peo-

ple and others who have already suffered chronic abuse.

"I'm a single mother, survivor of domestic violence and a rape survivor," Church said. "If pregnancy had been used by my abuser to exert control, I may never have gotten free of the cycle of abuse."

Church said she has already seen the effect of abortion limits on her patients' mental health.

"I've observed that for many white women, the overturn of Roe v. Wade has opened their eyes to their own lived experiences. Things like spousal rape, sexual assault, spiritual abuse, chronic trauma, control and coercion are only now being processed in light of this historic removal of human rights," Church said.

She said women in minority groups, on the other hand, have known their rights were in danger for much longer.

Megan Thornhill, who called herself a pro-choice advocate, asked how much of the city's public safety funding would be dedicated to enforcing state abortion laws. She also cited a 2022 study published in Ameri-

can Law and Economics Review, "The Impact of Legalized Abortion on Crime over the Last Two Decades," which estimates crime fell 17.5% from 1998 to 2014 due to legalized abortion.

"There is an inversely proportional relationship between access to abortion and criminal activity, and the changes are expected to occur incrementally and increase over time," she said. "It's clear that criminalizing abortion without reducing unwanted pregnancies has an immense social cost that will necessitate allocating more taxpayer funds toward dealing with the consequences of violent crimes that will inevitably result in future decades."

Cheryl Foster said Waco has a "time-honored tradition of sweeping uncomfortable issues under the rug" and that she was not surprised by the council's neutrality.

"If you want to keep it neutral, watch your data," Foster said. "Watch your funding, watch your police, watch your (District Attorney), and we'll be watching you."