

Editorial: Supreme Court puts women, workers at risk

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The U.S. Supreme Court faced the challenging task of weighing one person's right to free speech against another's right to be protected from harassment when it reviewed a Massachusetts law requiring 35-foot buffer zones around abortion clinics. Unfortunately, the court got the balance wrong when it voted Thursday to strike down the law.

As important as the First Amendment is, courts have long recognized that it may be restricted, within limits. Americans may protest, plead, hector and even offend, but they have no inalienable right to falsely shout "fire" in a crowded theater, play obscene movies on Main Street or intimidate or bully others going about their lawful business.

The Massachusetts buffer zones were established by the state Legislature after years of violence and intimidation by abortion opponents outside clinics. The fatal shooting of two clinic workers in Brookline, Mass., in 1994 by an abortion opponent spurred the original 2000 buffer zone law, which was eventually found by Massachusetts officials to be inadequate to the task of stopping opponents from intimidating clinic visitors – which is why they put a stricter law in place in 2007.

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