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NEWS HEALTH SYSTEMS

# Planned Parenthood Opens New Memphis Clinic to Better Serve Latino Residents—Next to an ICE Office

May 24, 2017, 4:58pm Tina Vasquez

"Planned Parenthood was aware of the proximity to ICE, but purchased the building with the understanding that the ICE office would be relocating," a spokesperson told *Rewire*.





The Planned Parenthood spokesperson told Rewire that to “mitigate” issues that may arise because of the proximity to an immigration enforcement office, immigration lawyers are on site; patients are made aware of the clinic’s proximity to ICE, and provided with alternative options for care; and Planned Parenthood has partnered with local organizations for staff “know your rights” training.

□ Jonathan Weiss / Shutterstock.com

**The Planned Parenthood Greater Memphis Region (PPGMR) on May 1 opened its second clinic in a predominantly Latino Memphis neighborhood to “better serve the city’s growing Spanish-speaking population,” according to a local news report. Area residents and community activists, however, are concerned about the facility being 400 feet away from an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office.**

**A Planned Parenthood Federation of America spokesperson told *Rewire* that when looking to open new locations, Planned Parenthood works with local affiliates to evaluate underserved areas. The process for the Memphis clinic was no different. The spokesperson said the location had been in the works “for a while” and that Planned Parenthood was aware of the proximity to ICE, but purchased the building with the understanding that the ICE office would relocate.**

“That was the understanding when the building was purchased and that’s what made us feel OK about it,” the spokesperson said. “But it became clear after the building was purchased that ICE’s timeline for leaving was not as quick as we thought. By the time the health center opened, they had not relocated. We understood it was an issue that needed to be addressed.”

PPGMR released a statement on April 28, in anticipation of May Day, a day which honors workers’ rights and immigrants and coincided with the clinic’s May 1 opening. The organization said it was its responsibility “to stand strongly and operate in greater partnership with our community and the organizations who serve it to reduce barriers and increase access to care and information for all.”

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The statement referenced the new health center’s proximity to ICE.

“[It] is in the shadow of an Immigration Customs and Enforcement office—a stark reminder of the threats faced daily by immigrants and refugees,” the statement read. “We realize this location will be a barrier to care for some the community we serve. Our highest priority is our patients, and we will be doing all we can to ensure that they can seek care safely and without fear.”

The Planned Parenthood spokesperson told *Rewire* that to “mitigate” issues that may arise because of the proximity to an immigration enforcement office, immigration lawyers are on site; patients are made aware of the clinic’s proximity to ICE, and provided with alternative options for care; and Planned Parenthood has partnered with local organizations for staff “know your rights” training.

Located at 835 Virginia Run Cove, the new Planned Parenthood facility is about 400 feet from the ICE office, located across a parking lot at 842 Virginia Run Cove. The office is marked by a door that says, “Homeland Security.” An ICE spokesperson confirmed with *Rewire* that “enforcement and removal operations [are] located there.”

In a statement to *Rewire*, PPGMR Vice President of External Affairs Aimee Lewis acknowledged that the new location may be a problem for some patients. “While we strive to do all we can to ensure everyone can access care, regardless of race, gender, income, zip code, sexual orientation, religion, or immigration status, the location of our new health center falls short of that goal,” Lewis said. “Its proximity to an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) center creates a barrier for some of our patients to access the health care they need safely and without fear.”

“We are working closely with immigration groups in the Memphis community to protect our patients and ensure they are able to get the health care they need.”

ICE is an immigration agency within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) responsible for the enforcement of federal immigration law. This is the agency tasked with arresting, detaining, and deporting undocumented people. Under President Trump, whose administration has taken a vehemently anti-immigrant approach by issuing executive orders that make everyone in the country without authorization deportable, the people targeted for immigration enforcement has expanded.

The places where undocumented immigrants have been taken into custody has expanded in recent years too, to include places where people seek health care. As *Rewire* reported in 2015, for example, an undocumented woman at the Northeast Women’s Healthcare clinic in Atascocita, Texas, which is part of the nonprofit health system Memorial Hermann, “was met by Harris County Sheriff’s deputies, who arrested her for allegedly using a false ID, as reported in the *Houston Press*.” Clinic staff kept the mother of two daughters, Blanca Borrego, “in the waiting room while the Sheriff’s department arrived and arrested Blanca,” according to advocates. When asked questions by the *Press*, like “whether it’s Memorial Hermann policy to call the police if staffers suspect patients of being undocumented immigrants or of using fraudulent documents to obtain a spouse’s employer-provided healthcare,” the hospital spokesperson told the publication, “As you know, because of patient privacy, I am unable to provide comment.”

Mauricio Calvo, executive director of the advocacy organization Latino Memphis, made headlines in February when he told a local newspaper that undocumented people are treated as if they don’t have rights and under Trump, and they should be prepared to be targeted. Calvo told *Rewire* that the location of the new Planned Parenthood clinic is “obviously not ideal.”

Tennessee has a rapidly expanding Latino population. In Shelby County, which comprises Memphis, Latinos make up about 6 percent of the population. Numbers for those who are in the

country without authorization are hard to track, but a bulk of Memphis' Latino population are new immigrants who are living in fear as a result of Trump's threats to their communities.

In 2014, 23 percent (more than 575,000 people) of Planned Parenthood patients nationwide were Latino. In Memphis, there was such a need for bilingual services and more capacity that PPMGR developed its plan for its new Virginia Run Cove location.

Calvo said that "about five months ago," he received a call from Ashley Coffield, president and CEO of PPGMR, asking for a meeting with him. (PPGMR confirmed in an email to *Rewire* that staff met with Calvo in December to discuss the new location.)

"So I met with her at her office and she said, 'I don't know how to begin to tell you this ...' But she laid it out. She said, 'We are opening a clinic and it's next to an immigration office.'"

Calvo told *Rewire* this was the second conversation of this nature he'd had with an organization. A few years prior, officials at a charter school were thinking of opening in the same area, but decided not to because of the proximity to ICE, Calvo said.

"It's not like a prime space, so I don't know why this building has been like a magnet," Calvo said.

The executive director of Latino Memphis was transparent in saying his organization has a strong, working relationship with Planned Parenthood. The sexual and reproductive health organization has sponsored Latino Memphis events in the past and once a week, attorneys with Latino Memphis participate in a community outreach at Planned Parenthood, offering immigration services and outreach to Latino patients. Planned Parenthood also goes to Latino Memphis' location once a week to provide free HIV testing, referrals, and other sexual and reproductive health services.

"Based on my conversation with [Coffield], it was really too late to pull back. They had a date they wanted to open and they had made a large investment in the place," Calvo said. "These [immigration enforcement] places don't have a huge sign outside that says 'ICE.' If you're not an immigrant or related to an immigrant, you don't understand what a door that says 'Homeland Security' could mean. Most people don't know."

Latino Memphis does not advertise the specific days of the week it will be at Planned Parenthood so as to avoid the possibility that ICE will engage in "roundups" or "raids" of undocumented immigrants, both of which the agency has repeatedly asserted it does not do, though there

is evidence to the contrary.

Calvo was quick to defend Planned Parenthood, saying that the organization is taking steps to “fix the problem” and that he has been repeatedly assured by Coffield—including at their meeting five months ago—that though she couldn’t do anything about the location, she would do her best to “make the most of the situation.”

Lewis added in her statement that Planned Parenthood has “two health centers in Memphis, and our patients may always choose the location that is best for them. Both locations offer a range of sexual health care services. Our longtime health center in Midtown Memphis is the only location offering in-clinic abortion services.”

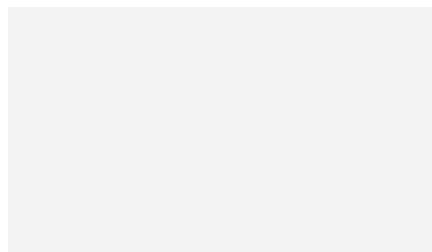
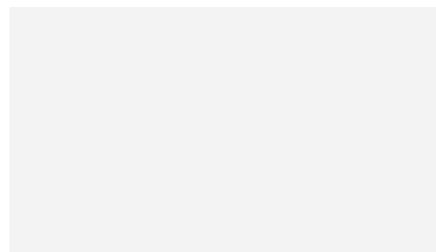
Coffield told *the Memphis Business Journal* that PPMGR’s first clinic in Midtown was operating at capacity and patients sometimes had to wait two or three weeks for “time-sensitive family planning services.” The new location will increase the number of PPMGR yearly visits from 13,000 to 20,000.

The large influx of people in such close proximity to an ICE enforcement office makes going to the clinic risky for undocumented people. Calvo said “there is always a risk when there is a large group of people in one place.”

“They can be rounded up,” he said. “When you think of the amount of women in particular who go to Planned Parenthood on any given day ... Is this ideal, is the location of the clinic ideal? Absolutely not. But I can say that had [Planned Parenthood] known, they wouldn’t have opened here. If they could do it again, they wouldn’t. It was a bad idea, but it is what it is.”

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