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Supreme Court Plaintiffs: LeRoy Carhart and Jill Lynelle Vibhakar

**LEROY H. CARHART**

Dr. LeRoy H. Carhart, the lead plaintiff in Gonzales v. Carhart, has been a surgeon and general medical practitioner for over 30 years. He obtained his medical degree at Hahnemann Medical College in Pennsylvania, interned at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland, and completed his surgery residency at Hahnemann and Atlantic City Medical Center in the 1970s. As a medical student and resident during the era before the Supreme Court’s landmark decision Roe v. Wade, he witnessed countless women brought to the hospital near death after receiving illegal abortions.

"When a woman finds herself in a desperate situation involving an unwanted pregnancy, even the fear of death will not deter her from seeking a solution," says Dr. Carhart. "For many, death was the alternative they received."

For the next 20 years, Dr. Carhart served as an officer in the U.S. Air Force, providing medical and surgical services to the women and men of the armed services and their dependents. Upon his retirement, he opened his own medical practice in Bellevue, Nebraska. It was soon thereafter that he made the decision to become an abortion provider and his fifteen-year battle against the anti-choice movement began.

In February 1988, Dr. Carhart performed his first abortion since providing services as a medical student. A short three years later, on September 6, 1991, an anti-choice arsonist set fire to and completely destroyed virtually everything his family owned—including their home, horse barn, camper, and two horse trailers. Seventeen horses and their pet cat and dog were also killed in the fire. In 2000, the Nebraska Republican Party and a state anti-choice group pressured the University of Nebraska into firing Dr. Carhart from his position as a volunteer assistant medical professor. He was only reinstated after the Center for Reproductive Rights filed suit in federal court. Later in the year, members of the anti-choice movement, including a state senator, attempted to buy the building that housed Dr. Carhart’s medical clinic with the intention of evicting him. But he fought back, successfully arguing in court that the building should be offered to him before anyone else.

Still—determined never to allow the anti-choice movement even a minute victory, Dr. Carhart made a major decision early on. "I decided to make the practice of abortion, training of physicians to become abortion providers, and increasing the availability of safe and legal abortions to a greater number of women, my goals for the remainder of my professional life."

In 2000, Dr. Carhart took the battle to the Supreme Court, fighting against a Nebraska abortion law similar to the Federal Abortion Ban. In that case Stenberg v. Carhart, the Court declared the state ban unconstitutional, ultimately protecting women from losing the right to obtain the best medical care. As a result, numerous federal courts struck down similar state abortion bans—those enacted before and after the decision. Now, six years later, Dr. Carhart is taking the lead again in the legal challenge against the Federal Abortion Ban in Gonzales v. Carhart.

**JILL LYNELLE VIBHAKAR**

Dr. Jill Lynelle Vibhakar, a plaintiff in Gonzales v. Carhart, is a board certified obstetrician and gynecologist licensed to practice medicine in Iowa. She has more than eight years of clinical experience and is an expert in the medical and surgical aspects of abortion. Dr. Vibhakar also has been an Assistant Professor of Clinical Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Iowa College of Medicine since 1999.

She received her medical degree from the University of Iowa College of Medicine and was a resident in obstetrics and gynecology at the Beth Israel Medical Center in New York, NY from 1995 until 1999. She is a Fellow of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

In her current position, Dr. Vibhakar teaches residents and medical students in obstetrics and gynecology, providing instruction on topics including ectopic pregnancy, chronic pelvic pain, normal and abnormal uterine bleeding, and medical and surgical abortions.

Dr. Vibhakar also treats gynecologic and obstetric patients at the University of Iowa faculty private practice. She delivers approximately 50 to 75 babies a year, treats patients with high risk pregnancies, and performs major and minor gynecologic surgeries including laparoscopic and hysteroscopic procedures. She also supervises residents in labor and delivery, continuity of care clinics, procedure clinics, and in the OR.

As the University of Iowa College of Medicine liaison to the Emma Goldman Clinic, a nonprofit reproductive health care provider in Iowa City, Dr. Vibhakar provides abortions and trains residents in abortions up to 19 weeks, 6 days of pregnancy as measured from the first day of the patient’s last menstrual period (LMP). She also provides abortions for medical indications at the university up to 23 weeks LMP.

As a dedicated Christian who is active in her church, Dr. Vibhakar has said she made the decision to become a provider because of her faith. She believes abortion is a woman’s decision, taking into account prayer, scripture, reason and experience.

Cases:

[Gonzales v. Carhart (NE)](http://www.reproductiverights.org/case/gonzales-v-carhart-ne)