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OB-GYN Files Complaint Against D.C. Hospital For Silencing Her Public Support Of Abortion

[ALEX ZIELINSKI](#) MAY 3, 2016, 3:05 PM

CREDIT: SHUTTERSTOCK

A Washington, D.C. OB-GYN filed a civil rights complaint Monday, charging that her hospital employer had wrongfully prohibited her from speaking publicly in support of abortion.

The doctor, Dr. Diane Horvath-Cosper, performs abortions as part of her “Family Planning Fellowship” position at D.C.’s MedStar Washington Hospital Center, and has been a long-time advocate for abortion rights at the local and national level. Last October, just a month before an anti-abortion gunman attacked a Colorado Planned Parenthood clinic, Horvath-Cosper published [an op-ed in the Washington Post](#) that chronicled the constant death threats she and her family receive on a weekly basis.

Muzzling employees...doesn't bolster the safety of patients and providers—but it does break the law

“I stand by what I do. I know that it is contentious,” she wrote. “But threats and violence are not the appropriate way to debate. Americans of good conscience can disagree

about the morality of abortion, but we should all agree that no physicians ought to be terrorized for doing their jobs.”

She never thought MedStar would oppose her public support, especially since advocacy is a required part of her fellowship.

But [according to the complaint](#), MedStar placed a “gag order” on Horvath-Cosper after the November shooting in Colorado Springs as a safety precaution. When she argued against the ban, hospital officials threatened to fire her, according to the complaint. The claim alleges that hospital director Dr. Gregory Argyros told her he did “not want to put a Kmart blue-light special on the fact that we provide abortions at MedStar.”

However, Horvath-Cosper’s attorneys at the National Woman’s Law Center (NWLC) said MedStar did little else to boost security measures at the hospital, aside from hiring one security guard and installing surveillance cameras.

“Safety for abortion patients and providers is critically important, but that’s not what this case is about,” said Gretchen Borchelt, NWLC’s vice president for reproductive rights and health. “Muzzling employees and otherwise discriminating against them for speaking out about abortion doesn’t bolster the safety of patients and providers—but it does break the law.”

Horvath-Cosper’s complaint alleges that MedStar’s act of silencing her violates the Church Amendment, a post-*Roe v. Wade* policy that protects physicians from employment discrimination based on their moral convictions. In the past, this amendment has more commonly been invoked in cases where physicians refuse to [perform abortions](#) or to [treat LGBT patients](#) due to their religious beliefs. NWLC says this complaint is “groundbreaking” for relying on the Church Amendment to argue the opposite: that Horvath-Cosper cannot be punished for her outspoken pro-choice advocacy.

If the civil rights division of the Department of Health and Human Services finds Horvath-Cosper’s complaint valid, MedStar could lose its federal funding.

If anything, this silencing has further inspired Horvath-Cosper to vocalize her defense of abortion and abortion providers.

“Especially at a time when abortion is marginalized and under attack, I’m compelled to speak out about the importance of abortion as a legal and safe medical procedure that’s critical to women’s health,” said Horvath-Cosper in a Tuesday press release. “Abortion has become so stigmatized in this country. As a doctor, I have a responsibility to urge that abortion be recognized as the integral part of women’s medical care that it is.”

[#ABORTION](#), [#CIVIL RIGHTS](#), [#HEALTH](#), [#REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS](#)

