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Statement on Gosnell practices and Delaware abortion Fund

The following statement was issued by STEPHANIE POGGI, executive director of the NATIONAL NETWORK OF ABORTION FUNDS:

The National Network of Abortion Funds is an affiliation of 100 grassroots abortion Funds across the country. Seventy-five percent of our abortion Funds are run completely by volunteers and have no paid staff. Abortion Funds exist to help women and girls who have decided to end a pregnancy but do not have the resources to pay for an abortion, low-income women who are disproportionately women of color and immigrant women. Funds do this by raising money in their communities and providing grants or no-interest loans to women who contact them for help. Last year we assisted over 21,000 women who needed assistance to obtain an abortion.

We have learned that Gosnell gave false information to one of our member Funds, the Delaware Pro-choice Medical Fund, and also covered up the clinic's dangerous practices in order to secure money from the Fund for abortion services for patients at Dr. Gosnell's Philadelphia clinic. As the Grand Jury Report describes, Gosnell specifically targeted low-income women, women of color, and immigrant women by offering services at significantly lower costs than other clinics in the area. In addition, Gosnell was clearly a master at covering up his dangerous, illegal, and immoral practices as it took a surprise raid by Pennsylvania officials investigating prescription drug improprieties to uncover what had been happening at the clinic for over 30 years.

The Network has reached out to the Delaware Pro-choice Medical Fund and can share the following information about the relationship between the Fund and Dr. Gosnell's clinic. Three volunteer board members of the Fund toured Gosnell's clinic in 2007. They were met by Dr. Gosnell and two other doctors as well as some administrative staff. Their tour took place on a day when abortions were not being provided, but other health care services were and the women saw several elderly patients in the waiting room. One of the other doctors, not Gosnell, showed the Fund members around the clinic. Nothing they saw, including the ultrasound room, waiting room, and recovery room, gave them any reason to be concerned about the practices of the clinic. After the tour, the Fund also did some research on Dr. Gosnell on a website that rates doctors and hospitals. On that site they discovered one sanction against another employee at the clinic but it appeared from the information available that the matter had been resolved eleven years prior.

The Fund did not consider the one sanction to be sufficient reason to deny help to women obtaining abortion services at the clinic.

It is important to remember that what the Grand Jury Report describes as regular practices at Gosnell's clinic are the exception to the rule in terms of abortion providers. Most abortion clinics are quality care providers who share our concern for women's well-being and health, and support ensuring access to abortion for women without financial resources. Our Funds typically have close working relationships with the clinics and providers they collaborate with to provide assistance and care to women in need. Nonetheless, these relationships are also built on trust and good faith -- and clearly in this case the Gosnell clinic staff were able to cover up their horrific practices.

In light of this situation, the Network is actively reviewing our policies and the recommendations we make to our members regarding relationships with clinics and providers. We are also committed to improving communication mechanisms within the network to help Funds more easily share any concerns they may have about a clinic or provider with other Funds. We will also work to support efforts to ensure that state agencies charged with monitoring quality care of all health services are doing their jobs and not allowing unscrupulous practitioners to endanger our lives.

The National Network of Abortion Funds includes 100 community-based abortion Funds across the U.S. and abroad. Last year, the Network and Funds directly assisted over 21,000 women who needed help to pay for their abortions. We also work to lift economic barriers to abortion at the state and federal level. Learn more at our website: www.fundabortionnow.org