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Pro-life Activist Targeted in FBI Raid

Mark Houck, a Catholic pro-life author and father of seven, faces felony charges after a Department of Justice team raided his home September 23 for allegedly injuring a man outside a Philadelphia abortion clinic nearly a year ago.

Around two dozen FBI agents swarmed Houck's property in rural Kintnersville, Pennsylvania, at 7:00 a.m. "Having quickly surrounded the house with rifles in firing position, 'they started pounding on the door and yelling for us to open it,'" Houck's wife, Ryan-Marie, told LifeSiteNews.



rumble/LifeSite

Targeted for defending life: The Houck family endured an armed raid of their home by FBI agents in September, in a case that a municipal court had already thrown out.

After pleading with the agents to calm down for the sake of his seven young children who were all present and crying, Houck opened the door. Ryan-Marie recalls "they had big, huge rifles pointed at Mark and pointed at me and kind of pointed throughout the house."

"The kids were all just screaming. It was all just very scary and traumatic," Ryan-Marie told the pro-life news outlet. She remembers standing with her husband on the ground floor, while agents ordered the children to stay at the top of the stairs where they had gathered in terror, watching the scene unfold.

At first the feds refused to produce a warrant for Mark's arrest, but when Ryan-Marie insisted, they gave her the "first page" of it and told her they were taking him to "the federal building in downtown Philadelphia." The warrant claimed that Mark had attacked a patient escort at an abortion mill, in violation of the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act (FACE), a measure passed in 1994 to "squell legitimate political protest activity," according to the National Legal Foundation (NLF).

The FACE Act makes it a federal crime to "injure, intimidate or interfere" with people at abortion clinics. NLF points out that "violence and intimidation" were already illegal prior to passage of the act, no matter where or against whom those crimes take place. FACE does not address any novel criminal issues; instead, it "does nothing more than allow the unconstitutional criminalization of legitimate political protest. FACE is simply another weapon designed to silence those dedicated to the protection, rather than the destruction, of life." Its only target is pro-life activists.

Houck's charge, according to his wife, stems from a case already thrown out of a Philadelphia court. It relates to his work as a weekly sidewalk counselor at two abortion clinics in that city. (Sidewalk counseling is law-abiding crisis intervention that takes place on public property outside abortion mills and provides life-affirming options to women who otherwise feel they have no alternatives.)

According to LifeSiteNews, this is how Ryan-Marie described the situation that the Philadelphia court deemed inconsequential:

On several occasions when Mark went to sidewalk counsel last year, he took his eldest son, who was only 12 at the time.... For "weeks and weeks," a "pro-abortion protester" would



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speak to the boy saying “crude ... inappropriate and disgusting things,” such as “you’re dad’s a fag,” and other statements that were too vulgar for her to convey.

Repeatedly, Mark would tell this pro-abortion man that he did not have permission to speak to his son and please refrain from doing so. And “he kept doing it and kind of came into [the son’s] personal space” obscenely ridiculing his father. At this point, “Mark shoved him away from his child, and the guy fell back.”

“He didn’t have any injuries or anything, but he tried to sue Mark,” and the case was thrown out of court in the early summer.

That is not the picture painted by Biden’s Department of Justice (DOJ) in a press release issued the day its agents raided Houck’s home and terrorized his family. The document describes Houck repeatedly assaulting a 72-year-old man for providing volunteer escort service to patients at an abortion mill:

According to court documents, the defendant is alleged to have twice assaulted a man because he was a volunteer reproductive health care clinic escort. The charges stem from two separate incidents both on October 13, 2021, which occurred at the Planned Parenthood Elizabeth Blackwell Health Center on Locust Street in Philadelphia, where Houck allegedly assaulted the victim, a 72-year-old man, identified in the Indictment as “B.L.,” because B.L. was a volunteer escort at the reproductive health care clinic. In the first incident, B.L. was attempting to escort two patients exiting the clinic, when the defendant forcefully shoved B.L. to the ground. In the second incident, the defendant verbally confronted B.L. and forcefully shoved B.L. to the ground in front of the Planned Parenthood center, causing injuries to B.L. that required medical attention.

Neither the press release nor the indictment suggests the specific nature of B.L.’s injuries. However, as if to plead his case, U.S. Attorney Jacqueline Romero stated, “Assault is always a serious offense, and under the FACE Act, if the victim is targeted because of their [sic] association with a reproductive healthcare clinic, it is a federal crime.” Her statement underscores NLF’s charge that the FACE Act aims at slapping pro-life activists with felonies. If convicted, Houck could be sentenced to as many as 11 years in prison and fines up to \$350,000.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Richard A. Lloret signed the warrant for Houck’s arrest. According to legal news website Law & Crime, Lloret rose to his current position during the Obama administration, having been selected by a district court judge and not directly appointed by Obama. The judge set Houck’s bail at \$10,000, and the latter was released on the day of his arrest.

Houck’s accuser, identified only as “B.L.” in the indictment, is actually Bruce Love, according to CBN News. He and Houck knew each other from their regular (albeit extremely different) work at the clinic. The report states that police were called to the “minor altercation back in October 2021,” but they “declined to pursue the case because of lack of evidence.” Love proceeded to file a criminal complaint against Houck in Philadelphia Municipal Court, and the judge dismissed the case when Love failed to show up to court hearings.



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Happy Day: Pro-lifers celebrate on the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, D.C., on June 24 when the decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* ended federal protections for abortion. (AP Images)

“Six days after the case was dismissed, Houck received a target letter from the DOJ notifying him he was the subject of a federal grand jury investigation,” writes CBN. Houck family representative Brian Middleton told the Christian news outlet that Houck immediately responded via his attorneys but did not receive any reply until FBI agents raided his home in late September.

The FBI is working hard at damage control since the raid hit national headlines. Fox News quotes a senior bureau official claiming that none of the agents pointed guns at Houck or his family. Another law-enforcement source told Fox that the agents never entered the house.

CBN likewise quotes two FBI Philadelphia statements discrediting the account that Houck’s wife remembers. The first asserts that “no SWAT Team or SWAT operators were involved.” Instead, the feds “knocked on Mr. Houck’s front door, identified themselves as FBI agents, and asked him to exit the residence.”

The second statement claims that “the number of personnel and vehicles widely reported as being on scene Friday is an overstatement, and the tactics used by FBI personnel were professional, in line with standard practices, and intended to ensure the safety of everyone present in and outside the residence.”

Most instead lend credence to Ryan-Marie’s account and wonder why agents did not simply serve papers on Houck or his lawyer, which is standard procedure in such a case. “A dawn raid, guns drawn — that is reserved for gang members, for people who are armed and dangerous,” former FBI Assistant Director Chris Swecker told Fox News. “My phone has exploded — former FBI executives, police chiefs, heads of state agencies who in the past have been big supporters of the FBI, who are fairly disgusted with what just happened.”

In a scathing op-ed, *Washington Examiner* writer and editor Quin Hillyer calls the FBI “dangerously thuggish” and “ethically derelict for so harshly targeting relatively mild anti-abortion protesters while showing almost no interest in filing even a single charge against those who vandalized or even firebombed nearly 100 pro-life pregnancy centers” since the release of the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*. FBI Director Christopher Wray, says Hillyer, must immediately reform this endemic “overuse of force,” or he “will have blood on his hands if a child or innocent is ever injured or killed” by “some random miscommunication or itchy trigger finger.”



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“This show of force carried out by the Biden regime against ordinary Americans is an abuse of power that stands against the fundamental principles on which our country was founded,” said Pennsylvania State Senator and Republican gubernatorial candidate Doug Mastriano in a statement. “As Governor, I will not allow the police state of Joe Biden to enforce his persecution against his political enemies on sacred Pennsylvania soil. Not on my watch.”

Joe and Ashley Garecht, pro-life friends of the Houcks, launched a GiveSendGo appeal soon after the FBI raid on Houck’s home to “help the family with any necessary expenses” related to his arrest. By the end of September the campaign had raised nearly \$350,000.

The Garechts describe Houck as founder of The King’s Men, “an organization that forms men to act as leaders and protectors in their families and communities, especially in the fight to end abortion.” In their appeal published at GiveSendGo.com, they also specify that the October 2021 incident at the Philadelphia clinic is captured on video.

But that hasn’t stopped Planned Parenthood and the Biden Administration. With no prior warning, and in spite of the fact that Mark is represented by an attorney, Biden’s Justice Department sent a fully armed SWAT team into a home full of young children at daybreak, to arrest a father for protecting his son.

Planned Parenthood and its pro-abortion allies want to send a message of fear to the pro-life community of Pennsylvania. But we have a different message to share:

We will not back down, we will not stop fighting to protect the lives of Pennsylvania’s unborn children, and we WILL NOT TOLERATE the harassment of our leaders by a corrupt and politicized justice system. [Emphasis in original.]

Meanwhile, Ryan-Marie says she is trying to help her children work through the stress of what they witnessed. “After they had taken Mark, and the kids were all screaming that he was their best friend, the [FBI agents on her porch] kind of softened a bit,” she told LifeSiteNews. “They looked pretty ashamed at what had just happened.”

Nevertheless, she is seeking professional psychiatric support for her children. “I don’t really know what’s going to come of it when you see guns pointed at your dad and your mom in your house when you first wake up in the morning,” she said.



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