



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on September 25, 2023

Police Drop Investigation Into U.K. Woman Arrested for Praying Near Abortion Clinic

Local police have discontinued their investigation of a U.K. woman who was arrested in March for the alleged crime of silently praying outside an abortion clinic — a “crime” for which she had just been acquitted.

Isabel Vaughan-Spruce, director of March for Life UK, was confronted by police while silently praying outside a Birmingham abortion clinic on March 6. Video of the incident, [posted online by ADF UK](#), which supported her legal defense, showed a policeman telling her to “step outside the exclusion zone” around the clinic — an area the Birmingham City Council designated to be free of all impediments to the so-called right to kill one’s unborn offspring.



Delmaine Donson/iStock/Getty Images Plus

Vaughan-Spruce countered that she was “not protesting” or “engaging in any of the activities prohibited” by the council’s order.

“But you’ve said you’re engaging in prayer, which is the offense,” replied the officer.

“Silent prayer,” clarified Vaughan-Spruce.

“No, but you were still engaging in prayer,” said the cop. “It is an offense.”

When Vaughan-Spruce refused either to budge or to stop praying, she was arrested.

Ironically, just weeks earlier, the Birmingham Magistrates Court had found Vaughn-Spruce not guilty for committing the same alleged offense in the same location in December.

After hearing little from the police since her arrest, Vaughan-Spruce finally got word last week. According to [ADF UK](#), “West Midlands Police has now issued an apology for the time taken to close Isabel’s case, confirming that ‘there will be no further investigation into the alleged matter, and there will be no further action taken.’” The [Daily Mail](#) reported that the police told Vaughan-Spruce “that they had dropped their investigation because the ‘limitation of proceedings’ had expired on September 6.”

“This isn’t 1984, but 2023 — I should never have been arrested or investigated simply for the thoughts I held in my own mind,” said Vaughan-Spruce. “Silent prayer is never criminal. I welcome West Midland[s] Police’s decision to end their investigation and their apology for the time it took to do so, but it’s important to highlight the extremely harmful implications of this ordeal not just for myself, but for everyone concerned with fundamental freedoms in the UK. What happened to me signals to others that they too could face arrest, interrogation, investigation, and potential prosecution if caught exercising their basic freedom of thought.”

Jeremiah Igunnubole, legal counsel for ADF UK, commented, “The arduous process of this criminal



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ordeal has been the punishment for Isabel. Moreover, her story has put the world on notice that fundamental freedoms are vulnerable in the UK.”

In fact, those freedoms may be more vulnerable than ever.

The order under which Vaughan-Spruce was arrested was at least restricted to Birmingham. It was issued pursuant to a 2014 law that gave local councils the authority to impose such buffer zones. Supposedly, such zones were to be imposed to stop “anti-social behavior,” though it is telling that the very first buffer zone was created around an abortion clinic. In addition, noted the *Mail*, “Buffer zones have been hailed by pro-choice campaigners as an important step towards de-stigmatizing abortion and preventing the harassment of those who attend abortion clinics.”

In May, however, Parliament passed a law that prohibits “influence” in a 150-meter zone around any abortion clinic in the country. According to the *Mail*, “Anyone found guilty of breaching the zone to intimidate, threaten or *persuade* women will face a fine or six months’ imprisonment, increasing to two years for repeat offenses.” (Emphasis added.) An amendment that would have exempted silent prayer and consensual conversations from the restrictions went down to a resounding defeat.

On the other hand, Home Secretary Suella Braverman sent a [letter](#) to police forces on September 1 warning them against “taking a political stance” when enforcing the law because such tactics “erode” the public’s respect for the police.

“I would also like to remind forces that holding lawful opinions, even if those opinions may offend others, is not a criminal offense,” Braverman wrote. And, she added, “it is worth remembering that silent prayer, in itself, is not unlawful.”

Braverman’s missive, combined with Vaughan-Spruce’s previous acquittal, is the likely impetus for West Midlands Police’s decision to let their investigation of the pro-life leader expire.

Perhaps they were also embarrassed by their failed attempt to pass the buck. ADF UK reported that

the police force failed to explain why they initially informed Vaughan-Spruce that the delay was a result of the matter being referred to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to consider charges — a claim which the CPS has firmly denied.

In response to [a Freedom of Information] request, the CPS confirmed that they “hold no information” concerning a second case being referred to them for a charging decision and that “the police should not submit a case to the CPS for charging advice when they have the power to make the charging decision themselves,” as was the case for Vaughan-Spruce’s alleged offense.

While Vaughan-Spruce has been relieved of her concern about being prosecuted, at least one more of His Majesty’s subjects is still waiting to learn his fate for praying silently outside yet another abortion clinic. [Adam Smith-Connor](#) “will appear at Poole Magistrates Court in November,” wrote ADF UK, which is also supporting his defense.

For Vaughan-Spruce, though, it’s back to praying near the Birmingham clinic. Furthermore, penned ADF UK, she “is currently considering options to pursue redress for her treatment at the hands of the police.”



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