



Abortion groups tussle over potential of gun violence

Gietzen: State conceal gun law may inflame conflict

Posted: [August 14, 2013 - 6:32pm](#)

By [Tim Carpenter](#)

timothy.carpenter@cjonline.com

A rezoning proposal designed to force a fledgling Wichita abortion clinic out of business generated a crossfire of commentary Wednesday among leaders of Kansas' most influential anti-abortion organizations about potential gun violence among activists.

The exchange erupted after the Kansas Coalition for Life's leader asserted shootouts might erupt at South Wind Women's Center, which opened in April in the building previously used by abortion doctor George Tiller. He was fatally shot in the head in 2009 during a church service by a gunman opposed to abortion.

Leaders of the state's two largest anti-abortion groups — Kansans for Life and Operation Rescue — joined with the Kansas Coalition for Life to ask the Wichita City Council for consideration of the zoning change. The council took no action Tuesday, leaving unaltered a February decision by the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission not to hear the request.

However, KFL and Operation Rescue moved to distance themselves from KCFL chairman Mark Gietzen, who claimed in a news release the threat of shootings at South Wind was enhanced by the Republican-led Legislature's adoption of conceal-and-carry law expanding avenues for people to take concealed handguns into public.

"He said things nobody should say," said Mary Kay Culp, executive director of Kansans for Life. She said Gietzen's commentary about guns was an attempt to scare city council members into action rather than rely on coherent arguments to buttress change.

She said Gietzen's release was interpreted by some people as a collective statement from KFL, KCFL and Operation Rescue, because it mentioned all three groups in the opening paragraph.

"With the new conceal-carry laws enacted since the closure of the Tiller abortion facility, the number of armed people present on site will likely be higher — not lower," Gietzen said. "South Wind escorts antagonize and provocatively taunt the pro-life volunteers on the site in ways that make serious violence more likely."

He said influx of advocates with concealed guns around the new Wichita clinic meant homes would "continuously be in the line of fire."

Culp said her organization wasn't part of a coalition with Gietzen's outfit. She said Gietzen didn't have permission to issue statements purporting to offer insight into positions held by Kansans for Life.

"Kansans for Life disagrees with and wishes to completely separate ourselves from Mr. Gietzen's controversial remarks citing the potential for gun violence at abortion clinics as a reason to rezone the South Wind clinic," Culp said.

She took exception to Gietzen's "outlandish and self-serving claim" that presence of conceal-and-carry permit holders at the Wichita abortion clinic was a legitimate reason to rezone property.

Cheryl Sullenger, senior policy advisor at Operation Rescue, said the abortion business shouldn't be located among residential properties. Linkage in a zoning debate between concealed guns and violence at abortion clinics is inappropriate, she said.

"I never mentioned gun violence in my comments to the city council. I don't think I would have done that," Sullenger said.

She said Operation Rescue and Gietzen's organization had similar goals of halting abortion in Wichita but weren't working as a formal coalition.

Tim Carpenter can be reached at (785) 295-1158 or timothy.carpenter@cjonline.com.

Follow Tim on Twitter [@TimVCarpenter](https://twitter.com/TimVCarpenter). Read [Tim's blog](#).

<http://cjonline.com/news/2013-08-14/abortion-groups-tussle-over-potential-gun-violence>