

NYC COUNCIL BILL SEEKS GAG ORDER ON ABORTION PROTESTERS

On August 21, the New York City Council will debate Bill NO. 645-A that seeks to limit the free speech rights of abortion protesters outside abortion clinics. The bill, introduced by council member Kathryn Freed, would make it illegal for abortion protesters to pass out leaflets or handbills to an unconsenting person outside abortion facilities. It would also ban signs, oral protest, education and counseling “within a radius of fifty feet from any entrance or exit of a reproductive health care facility, or the premises in which such a facility is located.”

Catholic League president William Donohue commented as follows:

“In 1994, gays paraded naked in front of St. Patrick’s Cathedral in an illegal march up Fifth Avenue and the New York City Council uttered not a word of protest. On many occasions, Rev. Al Sharpton has tied up traffic on bridges, bringing the city to a halt, and the New York City Council utters not a word of protest. But let Catholics pass out rosary beads to a woman seeking an abortion and the councilmen go berserk. They can tolerate every kind of free speech but this.

“The First Amendment does not have an asterisk next to it that makes free speech rights null and void for abortion protesters. Nor does it permit laws that violate the standard of viewpoint neutrality: it is illegal to deny to one class of protesters their right to free speech based on the content of their expression.

“If this bill were to become law, it would mean that priests and nuns who hold signs saying ‘Choose Life’ would be arrested and treated as common criminals. This is a gag order, pure and

simple.

“The Catholic League will ask council speaker Peter Vallone, co-sponsor of this bill, to sponsor an amendment that would ban the speech of protesters outside houses of worship within a radius of 500 feet.”