

Grand jury indicts activists behind Planned Parenthood videos

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HOUSTON (RNS)—A Texas grand jury investigating video-recorded allegations that Planned Parenthood illegally sold fetal organs instead indicted two of the people who made the controversial undercover videos.

The grand jury in Harris County indicted David Daleiden and Sandra Merritt on a felony charge of tampering with a governmental record. Daleiden also was indicted on a misdemeanor charge of “prohibition of the purchase and sale of human organs,” Harris County District Attorney Devon Anderson said.

The grand jury declined to indict anyone from Planned Parenthood of the Gulf Coast—the initial target of the investigation.

“We were called upon to investigate allegations of criminal conduct by Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast,” Anderson said. “As I stated at the outset of this investigation, we must go where the evidence leads us. All the evidence uncovered in the course of this investigation was presented to the grand jury. I respect their decision on this difficult case.”

Secretly recorded discussions

Daleiden and Merritt created a fake human-tissue company and secretly recorded Planned Parenthood workers discussing the disposal of organs. Planned Parenthood officials, who have sued the two and several others involved in making the videos, say the recordings were deceptively edited and falsely portrayed the highly regulated process by which organs from

aborted fetuses can be donated for medical research.

“These people broke the law to spread malicious lies about Planned Parenthood in order to advance their extreme anti-abortion political agenda. As the dust settles and the truth comes out, it’s become totally clear that the only people who engaged in wrongdoing are the criminals behind this fraud, and we’re glad they’re being held accountable,” said Eric Ferrero, a spokesman for Planned Parenthood Federation of America.

Racketeering suit filed

In other action, Planned Parenthood filed a federal racketeering lawsuit against Daleiden and Merritt, along with the Center for Medical Progress and BioMax, and several others identified as helping create the videos. The lawsuit filed in San Francisco claims the defendants “engaged in a complex criminal enterprise to defraud Planned Parenthood and prevent the health care organization from providing preventive and reproductive health services to millions of women and men.”

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott last summer called for the grand jury investigation, terming the allegations contained in the videos “repulsive and unconscionable.” Reacting to the grand jury announcement, Abbott wrote on Twitter: “Despite today’s decision in Harris Co. about Planned Parenthood, Texas will continue to protect life & [investigate@PPact practices.](#)”

Videos defended

In a guest editorial for USA TODAY published [online](#), Daleiden defended the videos.

“Six months after these revelations broke, Planned Parenthood still cannot deny that the shocking and indicting words on the videos were spoken by its own senior level leadership,” he wrote.

“Planned Parenthood cannot rebut the incriminating statements of its own leadership on these tapes, and so it has resorted to an awkward shuffle of blind denials and stagy distractions in their wake. The truth will continue to come out through the congressional probe, through the ongoing state investigations and through the frivolous lawsuit Planned Parenthood now brings in retaliation for its exposure.”

Rise in violence against clinics asserted

Planned Parenthood officials and the organization’s defenders assert the videos have prompted a dramatic rise in violence against abortion clinics, including a Nov. 27 shooting at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado Springs that left three dead. The suspect in that case, Robert Lewis Dear, claimed he was a “warrior for the babies.” He’s currently awaiting a mental-health competency exam.

Eleven states launched similar investigations into Planned Parenthood following the videos’ release; all cleared the organization of wrongdoing.

Officials with the Center For Medical Progress did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Republicans in the House of Representatives pushed through a resolution last fall to create a special subcommittee—called the Select Investigative Panel on Infant Lives—to investigate Planned Parenthood and other abortion providers. The panel has not yet met or announced a schedule of hearings, but it has begun hiring staff.

The top Democrat on the panel, Rep. Jan Schakowsky of Illinois, said the Texas ruling proves the congressional investigation is a waste of time and should be shuttered.

Trevor Hughes writes for USA Today. Reporter Paul Singer contributed.