

# Planned Parenthood disputes data

Agency, Waco police rebut anti-abortion group's claims that incidents go unreported

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Anti-abortion activists Wednesday presented data they say cast doubt on whether Planned Parenthood of Central Texas is properly reporting cases of underage sexual activity to

law enforcement.

Close examination of the data, however, shows the statistics are dubious. Not only does the information underrepresent the number of such reports made to Waco police, it also ignores reports made to other local law enforcement agencies.

The data was released at a news conference timed to coincide with a sex education event held annually by Planned Parenthood. Called Nobody's Fool, it's open to children in grades five to nine.

For the past several years, a group

called Pro-Life Waco has organized protests of the event. It also has hosted news conferences aimed at exposing what members say are the immoral, unethical or illegal activities of Planned Parenthood, both locally and nationally.

The idea that family planning agencies underreport incidences of underage sexual activity is a theme of abortion opponents nationwide. They claim clinics ignore evidence of illegal sexual activity involving young girls and even coach clients to lie to avoid mandatory

reporting laws.

No evidence of that has been presented locally, and Planned Parenthood officials here are emphatic in saying they follow the law. However, anti-abortion activists say they still are concerned that the phenomenon is happening here.

That is why Pro-Life Waco decided to obtain information about reports filed with the two agencies that the group says are most likely to receive them, co-director John Pisciotta said. They are

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the Waco Police Department and the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, which investigates child abuse.

The data show that from 2000 to 2005, Planned Parenthood made an average of 3.3 reports per year to Waco police, Pisciotta said. And from 2004 to 2006, it made an average of four reports to Family and Protective Services.

### Low numbers

Not only are those numbers low, Pisciotta said, they also contradict a statement Planned Parenthood director Pam Smallwood made to the *Tribune-Herald* last July. At the time, she said her organization had made at least 147 reports to law enforcement in the previous 18 months.

Extrapolating from that, Planned Parenthood claims to report 98 sex assaults on minors per year, Pisciotta said.

"Where are the other 91 reports?" he said. "Maybe they are out there. I don't know. But there is a big gap between seven and 98."

According to officials, however, the explanation for the supposed gap is simple: The data Pro-Life Waco obtained don't give a fair picture of reporting.

Take the statistics for Waco police. They were pulled from a log of calls for service. That's a record of when patrol officers respond to a location after a

### What does the law say?

In Texas, the age of consent for sex is 17. Anyone who sees evidence of sexual activity by someone under 17 must report it to authorities if one of the following criteria is met, even if the child says the sex was consensual:

- The child is age 13 or younger.
- The child is age 14, 15 or 16 and the sex partner is three or more years older.

People can be charged with a Class B misdemeanor for failing to make such a report.

Source: Texas Penal Code and Texas Family Code

call for help.

What the log doesn't record, however, are reports made in some other way, Assistant Chief Clare Crook said. That could include someone showing up at the police station or making a report over the phone.

The latter is the primary way health care professionals, including those at Planned Parenthood, make reports, Crook said. Officers don't respond immediately to such reports, she said. Rather, the reports are assigned to a detective for investigation.

Another problem with basing data off call logs, Waco police spokesman Sgt. Ryan Holt said, is that a report prompted by Planned Parenthood may not carry the agency's address, which is how Pro-Life Waco gauged where a report originated from. If an officer

were to respond to a call from Planned Parenthood staff and then found out the location of the illegal sex from the minor, the officer might list that location on the report instead of Planned Parenthood's address.

The reality, Holt said, is that there's no way for a member of the public to ascertain how many sexual assault reports come from a certain address. That's because state law forbids release of addresses of those reporting sexual assault for confidentiality reasons, he said.

In fact, the city may have erred in making the call log available to Pro-Life Waco, Holt said, because it contains exact addresses. The department's usual protocol is to only release sexual assault statistics by neighborhood association. That allows residents to have information about the general location of sexual assaults without compromising confidentiality.

### Reporting to other places

Another problem with the data presented by Pisciotta's group is that the numbers don't take into account reports filed with agencies other than the Waco Police Department or family services. Because crimes are investigated by the jurisdiction in which they occur, rather than the jurisdiction where they are reported, many cases are reported to authorities in other parts of Central Texas, Smallwood said. She noted that the Waco clinics have a 10-county service area.

The decision about to whom to report a case depends on sev-

**How old are Planned Parenthood's clients?**

- Under 15 – 1.2 percent
- 15 to 17 – 10.7 percent
- 18 to 19 – 13.02 percent
- 20 to 24 – 28.10 percent
- 25 to 29 – 18.4 percent
- Over 30 – 28.58 percent

Source: 2006 statistics from Planned Parenthood of Central Texas

eral factors, Smallwood said. They include whether staff is able to determine where the sex act took place, whether it occurred inside or outside the minor's home and whether it involved a family member.

The bottom line, Smallwood said, is that local Planned Parenthood staff members obey the law and report all suspected cases of illegal sexual activity involving minors, as well as any cases involving coerced sex, regardless of the age of the client.

Smallwood provided the *Tribune-Herald* with a log that contains information about clients for which a sexual assault claim has been made since July 1, 2006. It lists 46 individuals, nearly all of whom are younger than 18.

The list does not include names or other identifying information because of confidentiality laws. But it does list the patient's date of birth and the date of his or her visit to a local Planned Parenthood clinic.