

Pennsylvania mother sentenced to jail for giving daughter abortion pill

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Jennifer Ann Whalen, 39, a single mother and nursing home aide, was sentenced on Friday to 12 to 18 months in jail obtaining so-called abortion pills and providing them to her then 16-year-old daughter to end her pregnancy.

Whalen pleaded guilty in August to purchasing the pills for her daughter from an online European medicine retailer. She stood accused of violating a Pennsylvania law that states that only a physician can perform an abortion.

The intent of that law, and others like it that often date to the 19th century, was to discourage dangerous “back alley” operations, not to prosecute women for using drugs that induce an early miscarriage—first licensed in France in 1998 and which are held by medical experts to be safe.

Judge Gary Norton of the Mountour County Court of Common Pleas handed down a brutal sentence. In addition to the jail term, Whalen must pay a \$1,000 fine and perform 40 hours of community service. She will almost certainly lose her job.

Norton disregarded extenuating circumstances. Whalen, a low-paid worker, told the court that she had no health insurance for her daughter, and that the nearest abortion clinic was 74 miles away, in Harrisburg. Pennsylvania also maintains anti-abortion laws that require a patient to undergo counseling followed by a 24-hour wait. This would have required an extended hotel stay for Whalen and her daughter.

Whalen was “discovered” because she hospitalized her daughter when, after taking the pill, she complained of severe cramping and bleeding. Whalen’s daughter was diagnosed with an incomplete miscarriage and urinary tract infection. Whalen was then charged by state police with one felony count of illegal medical consultation and judgment, as well as misdemeanor

counts of prescribing medicine without being a licensed pharmacist, endangering the welfare of a child, and simple assault.

Whalen had ordered the drug package, a mixture of Misoprostol and Mifepristone, online for \$45 from a European drug vendor. She said she did know that she needed a prescription. Her daughter, who became pregnant in 2012, is now 18.

Medical experts view the drugs in question to be low-risk, even for home use with medical guidance, although both the federal and state government have imposed barriers to their use. “Self-induction with mifepristone and misoprostol is not your mother or your grandmother’s self-induction,” said Daniel Grossman, professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of California, San Francisco, in a recent interview. “Provided that women have good knowledge about using the medication properly, it’s a great option.”

Whalen’s own attorney has stated that she “made a poor choice.” But what choice did she have? With no insurance, presumably little money, and most likely an employer who would not give her time off, Whalen had few options.

The criminals who run America’s largest finance houses “made poor choices.” They plundered the economy—cooking the books, betting against their own shareholders’ assets, gaming the LIBOR interest rate system, and so on—leading to the crisis of 2008 and the ongoing social catastrophe that has devastated the country. Little Washingtonville, Pennsylvania, population 273, epitomizes these conditions, where residents have a per capita income of just over \$21,000—less than half the national average—and where about 20 percent of the population lives below the official poverty level. But not a single one of the financial players responsible for such destitution has

been punished for making “poor choices.”

The politicians, media talking heads, and generals that have led the US into war after war based on proven lies also “made poor choices” that have now destroyed several societies in the Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa, and killed or maimed thousands of US soldiers. The Obama administration has torn to shreds the Bill of Rights in a massive illegal spying operation, proclaimed the right to assassinate US citizens, and defended torturers. Yet none of these criminals have faced justice for their “poor choices.”

But Jennifer Anne Whalen, a nursing home assistant working at or near the minimum wage, who tried to help her teen daughter out of an unwanted pregnancy, is being put behind bars for a year and a half.

Such is “justice” in America, 2014.



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