

## 'Y' worker calls firing injustice

### She cites anti-abortion speaker as the reason

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Shannon Nixon invited an anti-abortion speaker to talk to some of the women at the YWCA of Greater Cincinnati. Two days later, she lost her job.

Cause, effect?

That's how Nixon sees it. She said her firing was an injustice.

"The question that I have is, 'Was I fired because the YWCA has a pro-choice bias?' " Nixon asked in a press release after her firing.

Nearly three months later, Nixon's protests continue to pop up on a variety of anti-abortion Web logs and forums. A man in Texas regularly writes to lawmakers and the media about the "young lady fired for having a conscience."

Calls to the YWCA have died down, but sometimes the organization still hears about Nixon. Charlene Ventura, president and CEO of the YWCA, said she can't really discuss it. "This whole issue is an employment issue," she said, but added: "The YWCA would never terminate someone because of their personal beliefs."

That hasn't quieted Nixon, 26, a graduate student at Xavier University. According to Nixon and anti-abortion advocate Arnold Culbreath, here's what happened: Nixon started a job as a YWCA caseworker in June. One of her responsibilities was to book speakers for the YWCA's employment and literacy program. She said she exhausted all the resources she knew so she turned to Culbreath, a friend, to discuss abortion alternatives.

Culbreath is the urban outreach director of Protecting Black Life, a North College Hill-based organization whose goal is to inform "the African-American community how we are being targeted by the abortion industry," according to its Web site.

Culbreath said he talked to 22 women in July without incident. He returned Oct. 30 for a different class, bringing a presentation that included a picture of an aborted fetus and a diagram of a partial-birth abortion.

"Some of the women in the presentation were a bit shocked," Culbreath said. "A couple of them left the room."

None of the women said they found the presentation inappropriate, Culbreath said. On Nov. 1, Nixon said, she was fired.

"I was just not a good fit for their environment," she said she was told.

She and Culbreath held a press conference later in the month, questioning whether the YWCA, as its slogan says, "really empower(s) women." A press release titled "YWCA Fires African American Pro-life Employee" went up on the Protecting Black Life Web site. The news traveled to anti-abortion advocates across the country. "The best way to empower people is to educate them," Nixon said. "I feel like the YWCA is a good organization, but if they're going to say that they're empowering women ... then they need to offer all sides."

Afterward, the YWCA started hearing from some activists in the anti-abortion circle, Ventura said. Culbreath continues to contact the organization about the incident. Ventura said most mainstream media outlets have chosen to ignore the complaint.

"We have great outcomes and a great reputation," she said, adding that the YWCA has never done anything to discriminate against an employee.

As for the abortion issue, while the YWCA nationally has taken a stance that supports abortion rights, abortion education isn't a focus of the YWCA here, Ventura said. Here the larger goals are ending violence toward women, empowering them economically, developing them as leaders.

"The issue," she said, "is really not related to what the YWCA is about."

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