

Arkansas Senate Aims to Cut Off State Funds to Abortion Providers

The Republican-led Arkansas Senate, in the latest statehouse swipe at abortion providers around the country, approved a bill on Tuesday that sponsors said was aimed at cutting off the last vestiges of state funding to groups such as Planned Parenthood.

While it does not explicitly name **Planned Parenthood** or any other organization, the bill would bar all Arkansas state funds from going to any entity that provides abortions, refers patients to abortion providers or contracts with any group that does so.

The measure cleared the state Senate on a mostly party-line 19-11 vote, and now moves to the Republican-controlled House, where it is expected to gain final passage.

Gov. Mike Beebe, a Democrat, has not said whether he would sign the bill. But the Arkansas legislature last month overrode his veto of two previous bills placing new restrictions on **abortions**, including one to ban most abortions from being performed after the 12th week of pregnancy.

“The hardworking taxpayers of Arkansas should not have to see their money sent to organizations that perform abortions,” said David Ray, a spokesman for the Republican Party of Arkansas. “Surely with all of our nation’s pressing problems in education, transportation and rampant government overspending, we can find something more responsible to do with these funds.”

Abortion rights advocates say the latest bill could effectively cut off funding for domestic violence shelters or

rape crisis centers that also happen to offer abortion referrals.

Planned Parenthood of the Heartland, which operates in Arkansas, does not currently receive any state dollars for its abortion or other family planning services, which are funded from other sources.

But if the bill becomes law, the organization stands to lose two state grants for HIV and syphilis prevention programs that it administers in Arkansas public high schools and reach about 2,000 women, men and teenagers, according to Planned Parenthood.

"Today's vote is extremely disappointing for the thousands of teens who count on us for life-saving prevention programs," said Jill June, the group's president and CEO.

Bills similar to the latest measure in Arkansas have passed in other states, including Indiana, New Jersey and Texas, according to the Susan B. Anthony List, an anti-abortion group in Washington, D.C.

In the most restrictive **anti-abortion** action to date, North Dakota's lawmakers approved legislation to ban most abortions after six weeks of pregnancy, though legal scholars have questioned whether that measure or a post-12-week ban would survive likely court challenges.

Efforts to clamp down on abortion and abortion providers in Arkansas were made after Republicans won control of both chambers of the state legislature for the first time since the Reconstruction era following the Civil War.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Arkansas, the national ACLU and the New York-based Center for Reproductive Rights plan to sue the state in federal court over the 12-week ban before it becomes law this summer.

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