

Federal Judge Blocks Alabama's Planned Parenthood Funds Cutoff

A federal judge Wednesday blocked Alabama from defunding Planned Parenthood clinics amid controversy over the release of covertly recorded videos about the reproductive health organization's handling of aborted fetal tissue.

U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson issued a preliminary injunction after Planned Parenthood challenged the state's move to terminate its contract to provide services under Medicaid, the federal and state healthcare program for the poor.

The judge wrote that Alabama had not provided a reason for terminating its agreement with the Planned Parenthood affiliate serving the region, as required under federal law. Planned Parenthood, which has clinics in Mobile and Birmingham, is an abortion provider.

"This is an absolute victory. The state of Alabama cannot impermissibly target abortion providers for unfair treatment," said Susan Watson, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Alabama, which joined in the lawsuit.

Alabama Governor Robert Bentley, a Republican named in the suit, said he was considering the state's legal options.

"I am disappointed, and vehemently disagree with the court's ruling today," he said in a statement.

He was one of several Republican governors who have sought to strip funding from Planned Parenthood clinics following the release this summer of videos secretly recorded by an anti-abortion group, the Center for Medical Progress.

Planned Parenthood has denied the group's claims that the videos show wrongdoing and has challenged similar defunding efforts in other Republican-controlled states, calling them politically motivated.

The organization cheered the Alabama ruling and noted that it has now seen success in three other states: Arkansas, Louisiana and Utah, where it also challenged similar defunding efforts.

"For the fourth time in six weeks, the courts have ruled to protect access to care at Planned Parenthood," said Cecile Richards, president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, in a statement.

In Louisiana, a federal judge temporarily blocked the state from cutting Medicaid funding to the group's clinics as the legal fight over the payments continues. Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, a Republican presidential candidate, has said he would appeal.

In Arkansas, the organization is pursuing a class action complaint on behalf of state Medicaid patients, after a U.S. judge narrowly ordered the state to continue payments to three women who challenged the state's defunding.

The organization also won a temporary judicial order barring Utah Governor Gary Herbert, a Republican, from revoking state contracts with Planned Parenthood. {eo}

(Reporting by Letitia Stein in Tampa, Fla.; Editing by Chizu Nomiyama and Eric Walsh)

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