

Iowa Board Votes to End 'Tele-Med' Abortions

The Iowa Board of Medicine took a final step on Friday to stop Planned Parenthood of the Heartland from providing abortion-inducing drugs to women via a video-conferencing system, a practice used to serve women in rural areas without doctors.

The board voted 8-2 to ban the practice, with most members arguing the best standard of care for a woman seeking an abortion is to have a doctor perform a physical exam and talk face-to-face with the patient.

Currently, women in remote parts of the state who live far from abortion providers can speak with a physician through Internet video and then take the medication to induce an early-term abortion.

Among those voting to ban telemedicine for abortions was Monsignor Frank Bognanno, pastor of Christ the King Catholic Parish in Des Moines and appointed to the board by Republican Governor Terry Branstad, an abortion foe.

"This is a big deal ... This isn't like taking an aspirin," Bognanno said.

Ann Gales, a lawyer and board member, voted against the ban, arguing for more examination of the issue and raising concern that the vote was being rushed.

"If this is the right rule, it will still be the right rule after we engage in a more thorough discussion," Gales said.

State laws requiring doctors to be present when abortion-inducing drugs are administered are becoming increasingly common, particularly in states run by Republican governors or Republican controlled legislatures. Eleven states have them,

said Elizabeth Nash, state issues manager for the Guttmacher Institute, a pro-choice research group.

Abortion rights advocates say the laws are unfair to rural residents who do not have access to doctors and depend on telemedicine to get abortions, Nash said.

Greg Hoversten, D.O., the Iowa medical board's chairman, voted for the ban.

"How can any of us possibly find that a medical abortion performed over the Internet is as safe as one provided by a physician in person, at the bedside?" Hoversten asked.

The ban on so-called "tele-med" abortions was set to take effect on November 6.

A lawyer for Planned Parenthood told reporters after the vote that, "all options are on the table," including possible legal action to prevent the rule from taking effect.

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