

Judge Keeps Planned Parenthood Out of Texas Program

A Texas judge on Friday denied a **Planned Parenthood** request to be allowed to offer health services to low-income women through a state program.

Texas now excludes abortion providers and affiliates from the program and Planned Parenthood has been fighting to become a provider again.

State District Judge Stephen Yelenosky, who issued a temporary ruling in favor of Planned Parenthood in November, said on Friday it was unlikely Planned Parenthood would succeed at trial.

"We are disappointed in that ruling and are confident in the merits and so we have the ability to press on to trial and try to change his mind," said Pete Schenkkan, an attorney representing Planned Parenthood, after a court hearing.

The state program now known as the Texas Women's Health Program provides family planning services and preventive health care to about 115,000 women. It does not provide abortions.

The federal government had provided 90 percent of the program's \$40 million annual budget, but stopped funding at the end of 2012 because it objected to the state's decision to enforce a law already on the books that bars funding for abortion providers and affiliates.

On January 1, Texas launched a nearly identical program funded by only state dollars so it could exclude Planned Parenthood, the program's largest provider. Planned Parenthood says it

served nearly half the women in what was until December 31 a Medicaid program.

The battle in Texas is one of several between Planned Parenthood, the nation's largest abortion provider, and states ruled by Republicans that are trying to exclude it from state programs.

Texas will assist any woman who needs to find a new doctor or clinic, state Health and Human Services Executive Commissioner Kyle Janek said. State officials announced earlier this month that they have found enough providers for the new program to allow it to serve more women than the old one did.

But the Center for Public Policy Priorities, which advocates for low-income Texans, said in a blog post this week that it is concerned because the commission assumes that some providers will see many times the number of women they served before.

"An increase in capacity of that magnitude is astonishing," wrote Stacey Pogue, a senior policy analyst at the Center.

Patricio Gonzales, chief executive of Planned Parenthood Association of Hidalgo County near the border, said Texas lawmakers are playing politics and have put an important program at risk. He testified that, without the funding, he might have to close three of his four clinics.

Planned Parenthood patient Marcy Balquinta, who has been in the health program since 2008, testified on Friday that she would like to continue receiving program services such as cancer screenings at Planned Parenthood.

"They make me feel very comfortable," said Balquinta, who does not have health insurance and is a plaintiff in the lawsuit.

But Republican Governor **Rick Perry** praised the ruling and said it shows Planned Parenthood's case "is nothing more than a

desperate move by an organization more concerned with obtaining taxpayer money than with helping women get care.”

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