

Judge Overturns Arizona Law Barring Planned Parenthood Funding

A federal judge has overturned an Arizona law that sought to block funding through the state for Planned Parenthood's health care clinics because the group also performs abortions.

U.S. District Court Judge Neil Wake ruled that the controversial measure signed into law last May by Arizona Gov. **Jan Brewer**, a Republican, unlawfully robs individuals on Medicaid of the ability to choose healthcare services.

"The Arizona Act violates the freedom of choice provision of the Medicaid Act precisely because every Medicaid beneficiary has the right to select any qualified health care provider," Wake ruled in a decision released on Friday.

Wake had put the Arizona law on a temporary hold in October following a lawsuit by **Planned Parenthood**, blocking the state from cutting off Medicaid funding for family planning and health services by the organization and other groups performing abortions.

Medicaid, a joint program between states and the federal government, provides health care coverage for low-income individuals.

The effort to defund Planned Parenthood in Arizona was part of an orchestrated move nationwide by conservatives who oppose **abortion**.

There was no immediate comment from the governor or the state attorney general's office late on Monday.

Arizona does not provide tax dollars for abortion, but backers said the law was needed to make sure that no indirect money

was funneled to organizations like Planned Parenthood that provide abortion and other health services.

Cathi Herrod, president of the conservative Center for Arizona Policy, said the ruling was “disheartening” and the group was weighing its options.

“Though we are disappointed, we are not defeated as this fight is far from over,” Herrod said in a statement, declining to be more specific about the center’s plans.

Bryan Howard, president and chief executive of Planned Parenthood Arizona, called the judge’s decision “a victory for all Arizonans” and vital for those women who count on the organization’s healthcare services.

“Politics should never interfere with a woman’s breast exam or birth control,” Howard said in a statement. “It is wrong for the state to tell Arizonans who can be their health care provider ... Our health centers are open today and they will be open tomorrow.”

Planned Parenthood officials said the organization provides thousands of women in the state with healthcare services. Only 3 percent of those services are abortions.

Lawmakers in more than a dozen states have taken steps to cut off funding for Planned Parenthood in the last few years, prompting several lawsuits.

Planned Parenthood is the country’s largest provider of abortions, conducting about one-fourth of those procedures performed in the United States. In 2011, Republicans unsuccessfully tried to end federal funding for the group.

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