

Judge Says Oklahoma Can End Planned Parenthood Contract

A federal judge on Monday rejected Planned Parenthood's bid to stop Oklahoma from ending its contract with the women's health organization to provide food vouchers and counseling to poor mothers in the Tulsa area.

U.S. District Judge Stephen Friot of the Western District of Oklahoma ruled that Planned Parenthood failed to prove its contract with the state's department of health was terminated for political reasons related to the group's support of abortion rights. The state contract ends on January 1.

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"But a routine, solvable problem can become a justifiable basis for strong action when it is compounded by persistent unresponsiveness in addressing the challenge," Friot wrote in his decision.

Losing the contract will force Planned Parenthood to close one of its three clinics in Tulsa, according to Penny Dickey, the organization's chief operating officer.

State officials have said other clinics can absorb the Planned Parenthood caseload in the Tulsa area when the contract ends.

Planned Parenthood does not perform abortions in Oklahoma, but it does refer women to clinics where abortions are carried out. It also dispenses the so-called "morning after" pill, which abortion opponents decry as **abortion-inducing drugs**.

State health officials have said politics played no part in ending an 18-year relationship with Planned Parenthood to help

provide services under the federal Women, Infant and Children's (WIC) program. It provides prenatal and postnatal counseling for mothers and food vouchers for children aged 5 and younger.

State officials say half the newborns in Oklahoma are enrolled in the WIC program.

At a preliminary injunction hearing last week, Oklahoma Health Commissioner Terry Cline, a defendant in the lawsuit, denied the move was made due to political pressure from anti-abortion forces in the state legislature. A bill there formally to prohibit the state from contracting with Planned Parenthood failed.

Cline and others cited poor performance by the Planned Parenthood clinics as the only reason for cutting ties with the group.

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