

Midwives—Trained to Help Women Birth Babies—Now Authorized to Abort Them

California's Democratic governor signed a law on Wednesday that will allow nurses and midwives to perform some abortions, a move aimed at increasing access to the procedure even as other states are tightening the rules.

Under the law, the most populous U.S. state would allow nurse practitioners, nurse-midwives and physician assistants to perform a procedure known as aspiration, which uses suction to dislodge an embryo from the uterine wall during the first few weeks of pregnancy.

Four other states—Oregon, Montana, Vermont and New Hampshire—already allow non-physicians to perform early stage abortions, but California is the first to codify the practice into law.

"Timely access to reproductive health services is critical to women's health," the bill's author, California state Assemblywoman Toni Atkins said in a statement after Gov. Jerry Brown announced the signing of the law.

The intent of the law, said Atkins' spokeswoman, Dale Kelly Bankhead, is to expand access to abortion in areas of the state where there are no providers.

"In more than half of the counties in California there is no abortion provider," Bankhead said. "Women have to travel long distances to access these services."

California Assemblyman Brian Jones, the Republican caucus leader, said he was disappointed in the governor, calling the new law "dangerous for women."

"It's truly disheartening and disingenuous that Gov. Brown and legislative Democrats created a law to lower the standard of care for the women under the guise of creating access," Jones said.

The measure, the progress of which has been closely followed by activists on both sides of the abortion debate, comes as a handful of states, primarily in the country's South and middle, have passed or enacted laws restricting abortion.

Some of those measures appeared designed to stand as challenges to *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision that made abortion legal.

Enacting freer access to abortion in a large state like California could eventually influence court cases involving more restrictive laws in other states, said Margaret Crosby, an American Civil Liberties Union attorney who worked with backers of the bill in the state Assembly.

Recent polls by the Gallup organization and the Pew Research Center showed that most Americans opposed overturning *Roe v. Wade*. A Pew poll published in January of 1,502 adults found that 63 percent believed the decision should not be overturned, versus 29 percent who thought it should be.

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