

Missouri Set to Become Only State Without Legal Abortion Access

Missouri is poised this week to become the only U.S. state without access to legal abortions as health officials refuse to renew its last clinic's license to perform the procedure, women's health services provider Planned Parenthood said on Tuesday.

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services did not respond to a request for comment.

The regulatory move is the latest in a wave of actions in Republican-led states to stop abortion. Anti-abortion activists say they aim to prompt the newly installed conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision that established a woman's right to terminate her pregnancy by enacting laws virtually assured of facing court challenges.

Missouri Governor Mike Parson on Friday signed a bill banning abortion beginning in the eighth week of pregnancy, making Missouri one of eight states that have passed anti-abortion legislation this year.

The clinic's license to provide abortions expires on Friday, after which it may no longer offer abortions. It would continue providing other health care services, a Planned Parenthood spokeswoman said.

The state department of health told the clinic it could not approve a license until it interviewed seven physicians who the state believed might be involved in "potential deficient practices," CBS News reported, citing written communication between the clinic and the health department.

Planned Parenthood said it could not comply with this request because it employs only two of the physicians, and the other five have not agreed to be interviewed, according to CBS.

Planned Parenthood said in a statement that the clinic would sue the state health department on Tuesday to preserve access to legal abortions in the state.

CHALLENGE TO EIGHT-WEEK BAN

Separately, the American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri said on Tuesday that it would seek to repeal Missouri's law banning abortion after the eighth week of pregnancy through a referendum on the state's 2020 election ballot.

If the Missouri Secretary of State certifies the referendum petition for circulation, the ACLU would then need to collect over 100,000 signatures before Aug. 28 – when the law is due to go into effect – to delay the law until a 2020 vote.

The recent wave of anti-abortion legislation reflects a boost of confidence among anti-abortion advocates after Republican President Donald Trump named two justices, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, to the U.S. Supreme Court, establishing a 5-4 conservative majority.

Earlier this year, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi and Ohio outlawed abortion after a doctor can detect an embryonic heartbeat, which can occur at six weeks, often before a woman knows she is pregnant. Two weeks ago, Alabama passed a total ban on abortions except if a pregnant woman's life is in danger.

Despite the uptick in anti-abortion measures, a Reuters/Ipsos poll found that 58% of American adults said abortion should be legal in most or all cases, up from 50% in a similar poll that ran 10 months earlier in July 2018.

The ACLU and Planned Parenthood filed a lawsuit against

Alabama last week and have obtained injunctions blocking the Kentucky and Mississippi anti-abortion laws.

Anti-abortion advocates have said they expected legal challenges to these laws and that they welcome the chance to have a court test their conviction that a fetus' right to life is paramount.

Meanwhile, U.S. Senator and Democratic presidential hopeful Kamala Harris on Tuesday was set to unveil her plan to protect abortion rights.

© 2019 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.