

Planned Parenthood Files Suit to Overturn Ala. Abortion Law

Planned Parenthood and the American Civil Liberties Union filed a federal lawsuit on Tuesday challenging a new Alabama law that tightens restrictions on abortion clinics in the state.

The law, signed by Gov. Robert Bentley in April and set to take effect next month, requires every doctor who performs an abortion at a clinic to have staff privileges at a local hospital.

Supporters of the law argue it is intended to make abortions safer and improve patient care. But critics say the law will unnecessarily restrict a woman's right under the U.S. Constitution to choose to have an abortion.

Filed in Montgomery, the lawsuit said the law will lead to the closure of three out of the state's five licensed health centers that provide abortions.

"We are in court to protect a woman's ability to make her own personal, private, health-care decisions," Staci Fox, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood Southeast, said in a statement.

Most Alabama clinics hire out-of-town physicians to perform abortions and partner with local doctors who have hospital admitting privileges to provide follow-up care.

Doctors at the clinics are often unable to obtain staff privileges because local hospitals oppose abortion rights or they live far from the area, the lawsuit said.

The law "would unconstitutionally restrict the ability of Alabama women, including victims of rape and incest to access

safe and legal abortions,” said Wayne Sabel, an attorney representing Planned Parenthood Southeast.

The health centers will have 180 days to meet the new standard after the law goes into effect on July 1. The law also mandates the clinics to meet the same facility standards as ambulatory care centers.

State Rep. Mary Sue McClurkin, a Republican who sponsored the legislation, said the law’s aim was not to shut abortion clinics.

“The bill states they have to meet the same codes as any other ambulatory center,” she said. “I am surprised they are filing lawsuits instead of bringing the clinics up to code.”

Anti-abortion activists have in recent years increasingly sought new state restrictions on the procedure.

Alabama became the seventh state to require hospital admitting privileges for abortion providers, according to the Washington-based Guttmacher Institute, which studies reproductive health.

A similar law in Mississippi threatens to close the state’s sole abortion clinic, which has been unable to obtain hospital privileges for its physicians.

Editing by Kevin Gray and Leslie Gevirtz

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