

Planned Parenthood Loses Ground in Texas

Texas won a court victory on Monday in its effort to stop state funds under a health program for low-income women from going to clinics affiliated with **Planned Parenthood**, a group that provides **abortions** at some of its facilities.

A Texas judge allowed the state to go ahead with a revamped program for poor women, the Women's Health Program, that does not include Planned Parenthood.

Planned Parenthood said it does not provide abortions at clinics that participate in the state women's health program. But it is the nation's leading reproductive health and abortion provider and the state objects to its affiliations with clinics that do provide abortions.

"The court does not find that an irreparable injury will occur to Planned Parenthood," Visiting State District Judge Gary Harger ruled in a one-page order released Monday following a hearing last week. Harger said this would not be the last word on the case, with another judge set to take up the issue again in less than two weeks.

"We are pleased that the court rejected Planned Parenthood's latest attempt to skirt state law," said Lauren Bean, spokeswoman for state Attorney General Greg Abbott.

"The Texas attorney general's office will continue to defend the Texas legislature's decision to prohibit abortion providers and their affiliates from receiving taxpayer dollars through the Women's Health Program," Bean said.

Monday's ruling will allow the state-funded Women's Health Program to begin operations Tuesday as scheduled. The program will have more than 3,500 doctors, clinics and other

providers, according to Linda Edwards Gockel, a spokeswoman for the Texas Health and Human Services Commission.

"We welcome Planned Parenthood's help in referring patients to providers in the new program," she said.

The case dates back to 2011, when a Republican super-majority in the Texas Legislature voted to refuse to allow any organization that provides abortion services or is affiliated with doctors who provide abortions from receiving taxpayer funding. But the state program was largely funded by the federal government.

When a federal appeals court ruled last summer that the so-called "affiliate rule" is unconstitutional, a "poison pill" inserted by the legislature ended the state's participation in the Medicaid-based program which used largely federal funding. It created the Women's Health Program using only Texas state funds, specifically outlawing funding for Planned Parenthood.

"I vehemently disagree with the state's efforts to blacklist a qualified provider and, thereby, interfere with a woman's right to choose her own provider," said Democratic state Rep. Donna Howard, a supporter of Planned Parenthood.

Sarah Wheat, interim co-CEO of Planned Parenthood of Central Texas, said the program was a lifeline for low income women to receive lifesaving health screenings.

"For sixty years this program has provided health screenings to women who otherwise would not have it, it has been a great federal-state partnership, it has saved taxpayer dollars, and Planned Parenthood has been a key part of this program from Day One," Wheat said.

Planned Parenthood says it has never used state tax money to pay for abortions, and using taxpayer money to fund abortions has been illegal in Texas for decades. But Howard says "extremist political influence" led to Planned Parenthood's

exclusion.

Planned Parenthood said dozens of clinics across the state have been forced to close due to the ongoing tug-of-war over abortion.

Wheat says in many rural and inner city areas of Texas, Planned Parenthood operates the only clinics which provide basic health services for poor women, and excluding the group will mean that tens of thousands of the estimated 110,000 low-income women the new program aims to help will not be able to find an alternative provider.

Gov. Rick Perry, who fought for the bill excluding Planned Parenthood from the program, praised Monday's ruling.

"Today's ruling finally clears the way for thousands of low-income Texas women to access much-needed care, while at the same time, respecting the values and laws of our state," Perry said in a statement. "I applaud all those who stand ready to help these women live healthy lives without sending taxpayer money to abortion providers and their affiliates."

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