

Pro-Abortion Activists Up in Arms About Oklahoma Abortion Bill

The Oklahoma House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed a bill on Thursday to apply new restrictions on abortions that lawmakers said are aimed at protecting **women's health** but opponents say are designed to shut down clinics.

The legislation includes a provision similar to one put in place in neighboring Texas that requires physicians who perform abortions to have admitting privileges at an appropriately equipped hospital within 30 miles of their practice.

The Republican lawmaker who wrote the legislation, Mike Ritze, a physician, said his goal was to ensure women who experience complications like hemorrhaging, can have access to hospital care immediately.

"If the federal law is going to allow **abortions**, the state has a responsibility to our citizens to ensure those procedures are done as safely as possible," Ritze said.

Opponents argue that, given the sparse population in most of Oklahoma, the admitting privileges requirement places an unjust burden on clinics and punishes people in rural parts of the state where medical care can be scarce.

"The intent of this legislation is to restrict access to safe, legal abortions, plain and simple," said Jill June, president and chief executive of **Planned Parenthood** of the Heartland.

The admitting privileges provision, almost identical to the one in Texas, was opposed by the Texas Hospital Association, which said it was unnecessary because women experiencing

abortion complications can go to a hospital emergency room and be treated.

Admitting privileges allow doctors to admit patients to a hospital for treatment. The privileges are usually given to doctors who are on staff at the hospital.

Jerry McPeak, a Democrat from Muskogee, said he voted against the measure because it would limit healthcare options for women in rural areas, like his district.

“Women in my district have the same right as everyone else to healthcare options. This bill wasn’t about abortion. It’s purely politics,” McPeak said.

The House voted 73-9 in favor of the bill.

An Oklahoma Senate panel voted 19-2 on Wednesday to approve a similar bill to the one passed by the House and will likely approve the measure when it goes to a full vote.

Federal courts have so far upheld the Texas law but opponents have filed appeals seeking to ease some of its restrictions.

Writing by Jon Herskovitz; Editing by Gunna Dickson

© 2014 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.