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Planned Parenthood Columbia clinic licensed to perform abortions

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The Columbia Planned Parenthood clinic is able to perform abortions for the first time since late November 2015, Planned Parenthood Great Plains said Tuesday.

The announcement, coming on the heels of a lawsuit challenging the latest legislative attempts to restrict abortion, means that the abortion provider is now accepting appointments for abortion services.

“We received our license and are excited to begin scheduling patients immediately,” spokeswoman Bonyen Lee-Gilmore wrote in a news release.

The first counseling appointments will be scheduled for Monday, Lee-Gilmore wrote in an email to the Tribune. The first day abortion services will be provided will be Oct. 23, she wrote.

Abortions were conducted at the Providence Road clinic from the 1970s through 2012, then again from July to November 2015. The first interruption was because the doctor performing abortions moved from the region. Abortions ended in November 2015 when University of Missouri Health Care stopped offering the hospital privileges required under state law for abortion providers.

In April, Planned Parenthood Great Plains and Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region and Southwest Missouri won a court order that the hospital privileges requirement and physical facility requirements of state law violated the abortion rights of pregnant women. U.S. District Judge Howard Sachs ordered the Department of Health and Senior Services to process the applications for abortion licenses in Kansas City, Columbia, Springfield and Joplin.

A license was issued Aug. 11 for the Kansas City clinic, but the Columbia license was held up for several weeks by an Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals order for a temporary stay on Sachs’ decision. The stay was [lifted Oct. 2](#), clearing the way for the license to be issued.

The licenses for Springfield and Joplin are still being processed, with inspections needed before the clinics can be licensed.

In the court action filed Tuesday, the two Planned Parenthood groups joined with the ACLU of Missouri to challenge a law passed in a special session. The new law includes a requirement that

the doctor performing the abortion provide pre-abortion counseling at least 72 hours before providing the medication or performing surgery to end the pregnancy. Under current law, the pre-abortion counseling can be provided by a nurse or social worker.

“This will result in extreme delays up to three to four weeks for women to access abortion, and it will cut some women off from care entirely,” a news release announcing the lawsuit stated.

Planned Parenthood already provides the full range of information required by law and the new legislation is only designed to limit how many abortions can be performed by filling physicians’ time, Planned Parenthood Great Plains interim President and CEO Aaron Samulcek said.

“This law is political interference at its worst,” he said. “It will force women to wait weeks for an abortion, or take that decision away from her altogether.”

In the lawsuit, filed in Jackson County Circuit Court, Planned Parenthood is asking for a temporary restraining order to prevent the law from taking effect on Oct. 24. The health department has said it plans to issue emergency rules to implement the law.

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