

Cut in state funds forces Abilene Planned Parenthood to set Nov. 9 as closing date

By Brian Bethel

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CEO: Closure related to state funding cuts

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bethelb@reporternews.com 325-676-6739

Planned Parenthood West Texas plans to close its Abilene health center Nov. 9, citing deep cuts in state funding that have affected its program and other health care providers across the state.

Medical records for local patients will be transferred to PPWT's San Angelo health center, or to other providers upon request, according to a statement from the organization.

The Abilene clinic, which opened in 2000, serves around 2,500 women, said Carla Holeva, PPWT's interim chief executive officer, 1,200 of whom are served through the state's Women's Health Program.

"This is directly related to state funding cuts," Holeva said. "Last September, we took a pretty big hit when we weren't eligible for Title 20 funds anymore in the state. ... That was about \$600,000 of our budget."

Earlier this year, Texas adopted a policy to exclude family planning clinics that are Planned Parenthood affiliates from participating in its Women's Health Program, according to a recent report by the George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services.

The program is currently administered under a waiver from Medicaid.

The federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services determined that Texas' stance "was contrary to policies permitting patients' freedom to choose their health care providers," according to the report, which led to the termination of federal

participation and cutting 90 percent of the funding for the program.

The state intends to offer its women's health program without federal funding, though Holeva said her organization has "yet to see" Gov. Rick Perry's replacement program in any detail.

"Unfortunately, with that funding cut coming up really fast here, we just cannot keep

this clinic open," she said.

Holeva said she knows many women will not be able to travel to San Angelo for services, adding that PPWT will help current clients seek continued care.

"We are working with individual women here on where they'd like to go," she said. "If we can, we will help them get into those clinicians, whether it's the local Taylor County health department or (an area Federally Qualified Health Center)."

State Rep. Susan King, R-Abilene, said: "I realize this is one provider for this program, and certainly people have the right to go to any provider they want. But we're trying to work with the Department of State Health Services just to identify and find out all the other providers that would be available in this grant. We want to make sure that if people want these services that they are able to find out where they are and how to get to them."

To Holeva, Perry made the funding fight "about abortion, which has nothing to do with this funding."

"You can't receive women's health and family planning funds if you're an abortion provider," she said. "Planned Parenthood of West Texas doesn't provide abortions. Our Planned Parenthood Choice Center has, but not West Texas."

A separate entity from PPWT, Planned Parenthood Choice offers in-clinic abortion at a clinic in Midland.

According to the organization's website, an "abortion pill," a combination of two medications used to abort a pregnancy of less than nine weeks by ultrasound, has been offered in Midland, San Angelo and Abilene.

In response, Sherri T. Statler, president of Christian Homes & Family Services, said she hoped "women who used Planned Parenthood will now seek out Abilene's better alternatives."

She mentioned:

Pregnancy Resources of Abilene offers free pregnancy and STD testing, counseling and ultrasounds.

The Alliance for Women and Children has always taken the lead in providing mammograms for women in need, and provides pap smears.

The Abilene/Taylor County Health Department offers affordable physicals, pap smears and monthly contraception.

Christian Homes & Family Services provides free maternity care to young women with unplanned pregnancies and adoption services.

Representatives of Abilene's West Texans for Life, regularly seen protesting outside the Planned Parenthood clinic, expressed "joy gratitude and sorrow" at its closure, according to written statements.

James Sulliman, vice president of West Texans for Life, said that when that organization and a related 40 Days for Life prayer/protest campaign were introduced to the community, "many asked, 'What good can a small group of people do to combat such a large, powerful, wealthy organization like Planned Parenthood?' "

"Today, that question has been answered," he said.



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