

# Planned Parenthood adds abortions; Bevin irate



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(Photo: By Pat McDonogh, The CJ)

Planned Parenthood has begun offering abortions for the first time in Kentucky at a new health center it opened last month in downtown Louisville – a move that quickly inflamed political passions in Frankfort, where anti-abortion sentiment is strong among some lawmakers.

The news drew immediate fire from Gov. Matt Bevin, an anti-abortion Republican.

"They are openly and knowingly operating an unlicensed abortion facility in clear violation of the law," Bevin said in a statement. "We will use the full force of the commonwealth to put a

stop to this. There is no room in Kentucky for this kind of blatant disregard for proper legal procedure."

A Planned Parenthood spokeswoman responded that the organization "applied for an abortion facility license and commenced services under the guidance of the Office of the Inspector General, the state office that is responsible for licensing health facilities."

That office is housed within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, part of state government. Planned Parenthood didn't say whether it had yet received the license, only that it followed the guidance of the licensing agency in beginning abortion services.

Betty Cockrum, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood of Indiana and Kentucky, or PPINK, said the decision to offer abortion services was based on women's medical needs, not politics.

"We knew we were functioning in a really important community where there's a great unmet need," Cockrum said.

She said Planned Parenthood officials considered the matter carefully before deciding to include surgical and non-surgical abortions (those induced by medication) among the health services at the new site on Seventh Street.

"It's a very important decision and absolutely you have to give much careful thought to it," Cockrum said.

Kentucky previously had only one abortion provider, a private clinic in Louisville that also operates a part-time clinic in Lexington.

The news dismayed officials with Kentucky Right to Life, an anti-abortion group, said its president, Margie Montgomery.

"It's very upsetting, of course," she said. "There are going to be more aborted babies."

Montgomery said her organization will continue to try to educate women about abortions and provide "positive" alternatives such as free pregnancy counseling centers.

Montgomery said Right to Life had been concerned about the possibility of Planned Parenthood offering abortions since the Kentucky and Indiana chapters of the organization merged in 2013. The organization already provides surgical abortions in Indiana at three locations and non-surgical abortions at four.

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But supporters of abortion rights on Thursday hailed it as welcomed step.

"We believe Kentucky is vastly underserved when it comes to health care options for women," said Derek Selznick, reproductive freedom project director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky.

And he noted that if the goal of opponents is to reduce abortion, Planned Parenthood helps achieve that through birth control services and family planning counseling it offers.

"I think they're part of the solution," Selznick said.

In a media release Thursday, PPINK said the center also offers cancer screenings, medical exams, birth control services, and testing for HIV and sexually transmitted diseases.

The move to provide abortions is sure to be controversial in Kentucky's political climate as bills aimed at curbing abortion are pending in the current session of the General Assembly. Bevin also has included in his proposed budget language that would bar any organization that provides abortions from receiving state funds.

Planned Parenthood announced it was offering abortions in Louisville on the same afternoon lawmakers in the House were debating a bill that would require women to wait 24 hours for an abortion after receiving counseling in person from a medical provider. Senate Bill 4, sponsored by Sen. Julie Raque Adams, would require a woman to receive counseling in person rather than by phone as the law now allows.

Adams, a Louisville Republican, said she was sorry to learn Planned Parenthood had begun offering abortion services in Louisville. "That saddens me," she said.

But Rep. Mary Lou Marzian, a Louisville Democrat and supporter of abortion rights, welcomed the news.

"Any time we have safe, legal health care services for women so desperately needed in this state, it's a step forward for women in Kentucky," she said.

Planned Parenthood, which previously operated from a clinic on South Second Street, selected and designed its new location to accommodate abortion services. It is surrounded by privacy walls and fencing with a secured entrance.

At Louisville's other abortion clinic, patients must walk through abortion opponents who regularly protest at the storefront site on West Market Street.

Planned Parenthood clinics in other cities also have been subject to violent attacks, most recently in November in Colorado Springs where a gunman killed three people.

Cockrum said the new center in Louisville was designed with patients and staff in mind. "Security, safety and privacy was of paramount importance," she said.

Cockrum said the project was covered with private donations.

"There are people out there who recognize and support the need for high quality, accessible service for women," she said.

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