

Abortion services temporarily unavailable at Merrillville clinic

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The Planned Parenthood clinic in Merrillville provides reproductive and other health services for women and men. John Luke | The Times

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INDIANAPOLIS — Abortion services temporarily are unavailable at the Planned Parenthood health center in Merrillville due to a state law requiring abortion doctors, or another "back-up" physician, have admitting privileges at a local hospital.

According to the State Department of Health, the Merrillville clinic's back-up doctor, whose name by law cannot be released by the state, ended the doctor's relationship with Planned Parenthood on July 13.

As a result, abortions in Merrillville have been halted and cannot again be performed until another physician with local admitting privileges agrees to serve in the role.

Christie Gillespie, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood of Indiana and Kentucky, said the Merrillville health center remains open and continues to provide family planning and other health services.

She said women seeking abortions are being referred to other facilities.

"Our organization complies with every state law, and does not comment on personnel issues," Gillespie said. "We have every confidence that we will be providing abortion care for our patients at our Merrillville health center soon."

Indiana is among just eight states with an enforceable admitting privileges requirement, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a nonpartisan sexual and reproductive health research organization.

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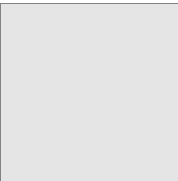
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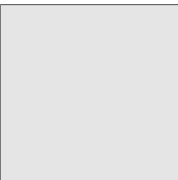
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Critics of the mandate claim it is intended to restrict abortion access, since abortion doctors often cannot obtain the privileges as abortion procedures rarely require hospital admission.

Religiously affiliated hospitals also typically refuse to extend privileges to abortion doctors.

Supporters of the admitting privileges requirement, including Indiana Right to Life President Mike Fichter, believe it is necessary to preserve health and safety.

"In case of an emergency, admitting privileges ensure a woman is aided in the most expedient manner possible," Fichter said.

State records show the Merrillville Planned Parenthood performed 1,278 abortions in 2016, accounting for nearly 18 percent of the Indiana's 7,277 abortions.

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