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More Ohio abortion clinics closing

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A suburban Cincinnati clinic's appeal to remain open was rejected last week by the Ohio Department of Health, which followed last month's closure of a Cleveland facility. A Toledo center remains open during an appeal of its closure order.

Without those three -- as well as two others that closed earlier this year -- Ohio would be reduced to nine abortion clinics.

Mike Gonidakis, president of Ohio Right to Life, applauded the reduction: "From our perspective we think that's a good thing."

Kellie Copeland, executive director of NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio, lamented it: "This is all a regulatory witch hunt and isn't about patient safety."

The Lebanon Road Surgery Center in Sharonville was ordered closed by the state because it did not have a valid transfer agreement -- a pact with an area hospital to accept abortion patients if help is needed. The state

health director rejected the clinic's request for a variance, and his decision was upheld by a hearing officer last week.

On Sept. 30, the Cleveland Center for Women's Health shut down.

Toledo's Capital Care Women's Center also does not have a transfer agreement; a hearing on its appeal has not been scheduled.

Gonidakis said the Cleveland facility, operated by Dr. Martin Ruddock, specialized in late-term abortions. He credited the closure to Ohio's two-year-old ban on abortions of viable fetuses after 20 weeks of pregnancy.

Attempts to reach Ruddock were unsuccessful; the clinic's number is no longer in service.

In 2006, Ruddock's clinic was cited by the Ohio Department of Health for failing to meet basic health standards, such as checking a patient's vitals before performing a late-term abortion. An Akron-area clinic shut down earlier this year was cited for health violations, including rust and mold on equipment.

Copeland said the Sharonville clinic had "an exemplary record of medical safety."

"It seems the problem isn't clinics providing excellent care but rather all the restrictions of abortion care making it more difficult for physicians to operate clinics in Ohio," Copeland said.

She blamed politics for the reductions.

"This move is an abuse of power motivated by pressure from Ohio Right to Life, an anti-choice organization led by Governor (John) Kasich's appointee to the State Medical Board, Mike Gonidakis. Kasich's agenda is clear--to put politicians in charge of women's personal, private medical decisions by closing every abortion clinic in this state, despite their incredible safety record."

The state budget approved by Kasich and the legislature last summer added more abortion restrictions, including a ban on public hospitals from entering into transfer agreements with abortion clinics, which clinics need to keep their licenses under existing Ohio Law.

With more and more clinics closing, Copeland said she worries where women seeking abortions will turn.

“My concern is that if there aren’t enough clinics to take care of women that seek abortion care, women will turn to desperate measures.”

Gonidakis said that Ohio has 125 pregnancy centers that provide prenatal care, clothing, formula and diapers and teach parenting classes, along with about 35 community action agencies and more than 100 community health centers.

“Thankfully low income women have many many options in Ohio,” he said.

Last week, the American Civil Liberties Union announced a lawsuit challenging three controversial abortion related amendments from the budget arguing that Kasich and the legislature violated an oft-ignored provision of the Ohio Constitution limiting legislation to a single subject.

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