

# *California Expands Availability of Abortions*

By **Ian Lovett**

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LOS ANGELES — Gov. Jerry Brown on Wednesday expanded access to abortion in California, signing a bill to allow nurse practitioners, midwives and physician assistants to perform a common type of the procedure, an aspiration abortion, during the first trimester.

Oregon, Montana, Vermont and New Hampshire allow nurse practitioners to perform such abortions, which use a tube and suction, while several other states, including California, permit nonphysicians to provide drugs to terminate pregnancy.

But the new California law goes further, allowing a wider range of nonphysician practitioners to perform surgical abortions. While other states have passed a tide of laws restricting abortion access, California has gone against the political tide.

“We are trending in a different direction, and we’re very proud of it,” said Toni Atkins, the state assemblywoman who wrote the bill. “California has a strong history of support for reproductive health care for women.” She said women in rural parts of the state had trouble finding an abortion provider.

“This is an issue of accessibility,” Ms. Atkins said. “California is a very large state, and more than half the counties don’t have an abortion provider.”

Abortion opponents said the new law would endanger women’s health.

“This bill trivializes what is taking place with abortion,” said Brian Johnston, director of the National Right to Life’s Western regional office. “It will massively expand the number of abortions and at the same time reduce safety. For those who say they care about women’s health, they’re doing the opposite, reducing the medical standards for abortion.”

This is not the first time in recent years that California — where Democrats control all statewide offices and both houses of the State Legislature — has bucked national trends. Last year, while conservative state governments were enacting tougher qualifications for voting, Democrats passed a series of laws intended to make registration and voting easier than ever.

But on the issue of abortion, California is the only state this year to have expanded access to the procedure.

By contrast, 68 restrictions on abortion have been passed by states so far this year, according to Elizabeth Nash, the state issues manager for the Guttmacher Institute, a research organization that studies reproductive health issues.

“California is moving in a direction to protect reproductive health, as other states across the country are passing abortion restrictions,” Ms. Nash said. Supporters of the bill pointed to a state pilot program at the University of California, San Francisco, which found that nurse practitioners, certified midwife nurses and physician assistants were able to provide the procedure just as safely as surgeons.

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