

Abortion unavailable in most cases in Mississippi and Louisiana as bans take effect

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Rogelio V. Solis/AP

Abortion rights advocates stand outside the Jackson Women's Health Organization clinic in Jackson, Mississippi, and attempt to shout down a group of abortion opponents, on July 7, 2022.

(CNN) — Abortion services have stopped in Mississippi and Louisiana now that so-called trigger laws enacted by the states are in effect following the US Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe v. Wade.

Mississippi's last abortion clinic, Jackson Women's Health Organization, has been forced to close its doors this week after the state's ban took effect Thursday. And in Louisiana, an Orleans Parish Civil District Court judge on Friday lifted a temporary restraining order, allowing the state to enforce its near-total ban on the procedure there.

The moves underscore the struggle over abortion access at the state level. Legal fights over abortion bans and other laws that greatly limit the procedure are underway in more

over abortion bans and other laws that greatly limit the procedure are underway in more than a dozen states, as Americans navigate rapidly changing laws and court developments in a post-Roe era.

‘This was a very busy clinic’

Known as the “Pink House” for operating out of a pink stucco building, Jackson Women’s Health Organization had provided abortion services for decades and was the provider that had brought the lawsuit against Mississippi’s 15-week abortion ban, which led to the US Supreme Court’s ruling last month.

Mississippi’s trigger ban, enacted in 2007, prohibits abortions in the state with only exceptions in cases of rape or to preserve the life of the pregnant person. It took effect Thursday after a Mississippi judge earlier in the week denied a motion by the clinic to block the law.

Jackson Women’s Health Organization’s owner Diane Derzis told CNN that the clinic saw 69 patients on Wednesday and did procedures through the day until they had to close, with some follow-up appointments on Thursday.



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“This was always a very busy clinic. So we realize the numbers of women who are going to be left in the lurch and will have to travel out of state, or continue a pregnancy, or do something themselves. It’s the latter that worries you more than anything else. Because there’s definitely desperation,” Derzis told CNN.

Jackson Women’s Health Organization referred more than 100 patients to its Columbus clinic in the last two days, according to Derzis.

She said they had begun packing Friday to move to a new clinic in Las Cruces, New Mexico, where she expects they will be opened by next week.

“People should see what has been wrought here with this ruling and how it’s going to affect women, children and their families in this country. This is an outrage in 2022 that women are forced to skulk out of state into another state to receive medical care. It’s just unbelievable,” Derzis told CNN.

The clinic has appealed to the state's Supreme Court.

"Mississippians still have a separate and independent right to privacy under the Mississippi Constitution that the Mississippi Supreme Court held encompasses a right to abortion," Jackson Women's Health Organization argued in the lawsuit filed last month.

'This case is by no means over'

During a court hearing in Louisiana on Friday, Judge Ethel S. Julien lifted the temporary block on a restrictive abortion ban in the state, clearing the way for the state's trigger law to immediately take effect and blocking abortion clinics in the state from operating.

Last month, a Louisiana state court blocked the state's trigger law from being enforced by issuing a temporary restraining order. Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry appealed, asking the state Supreme Court to dissolve the lower court's order. The court denied that appeal and kicked it back to the lower courts for a hearing.

Julien on Friday agreed with the state, that the challenge against the state's abortion laws should be brought in a Baton Rouge state court, instead of New Orleans, Walt Pierce, the court's public information officer told CNN.

Abortion providers then asked the judge to continue the temporary restraining order while the case was being transferred to the 19th Judicial District Court. After retiring to her chambers to study the request, Julien ruled she did not have the authority to extend the temporary restraining order, citing her earlier ruling that New Orleans was not the proper venue for the case, Pierce told CNN.

The challenge to the law by abortion providers will now be transferred to the 19th Judicial District Court in Baton Rouge.

"Today the judge got it right," Landry said during a news conference after the hearing, adding, "We certainly intend to continue to defend the laws of the state and to enforce the laws."

The Center for Reproductive Rights, one of the litigators in the case, said it plans to "ask the new court in Baton Rouge to block the bans again as soon as possible."

"Today's ruling was on a technicality, and did not touch the merits of this case. I am personally devastated for patients in Louisiana who are now panicking trying to figure out how to get care. But to be clear, this case is by no means over," Jenny Ma, the

group's senior staff attorney, said in a statement Friday.

"Since Roe fell last month, abortion services have ceased in nine other states, and that number is continuing to grow. With every state that bans abortion, the distance patients in the south have to travel grows exponentially. So losing access in Louisiana, even for a day, is contributing to a growing health crisis not only for people in Louisiana but across the south."

Texas' largest independent abortion provider closes clinics

Jackson Women's Health Organization isn't the only southern abortion provider moving its operation.

While abortion is effectively banned in Texas with very limited exceptions following the high court decision, abortion is legal in New Mexico.

Whole Woman's Health, the largest independent abortion provider in Texas, announced on Wednesday that it is closing four clinics in Texas and is seeking a clinic site at a New Mexico border city to provide first and second trimester abortions.

Abortions up to around six weeks into pregnancy had been allowed to resume in Texas after a state court issued a temporary restraining order against the state's nearly century-old abortion ban. But late last Friday, the Texas Supreme Court paved the way for Texas' pre-Roe abortion ban to be civilly enforced, prompting the clinics to again cease providing abortion services.

The state's trigger law also goes into effect in the next few weeks.

Other clinics in the state, such as Planned Parenthood's three Texas affiliates, Houston Women's Clinic and Houston Women's Reproductive Services, have said they are unable to provide abortion care in the wake of Roe being overturned.

CNN's Tierney Sneed and Natasha Chen contributed to this report.

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