

Mississippi: Only state without abortion clinic?

July 1 2012, by EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS

(AP) — Mississippi soon could become the only U.S. state without an abortion clinic as a new law takes effect this weekend. Critics say it would force women in one of the country's poorest states to drive hours to obtain a constitutionally protected procedure or carry unwanted pregnancies to term.

Top officials say limiting abortions is exactly what they have in mind.

Republican Gov. Phil Bryant says he wants Mississippi to be "abortion-free." The law takes effect Sunday.

Abortion rights supporters have sued, asking a judge to temporarily block the law from taking effect. So far, that hasn't happened.

The law requires anyone performing abortions at the state's only clinic to be a doctor with privileges to admit patients to a local hospital. Such privileges can be difficult to obtain, and the clinic contends the mandate is designed to put it out of business. A clinic spokeswoman, Betty Thompson, has said the two physicians who do abortions there travel to the clinic from other states.

Michelle Movahed of the New York-based Center for Reproductive Rights is one of the attorneys representing the clinic. She said Friday that several states — including Mississippi, Kansas and Oklahoma — have tried in the past few years to chip away at access to abortion.

"One of the things that has really been surprising about Mississippi is how open the legislators and elected officials have been about their intentions," Movahed said. "They're not even pretending it's about public safety. They're openly saying they're using this law to try to shut down the last abortion provider in the state."

Religious-affiliated hospitals might not grant admitting privileges to those who perform elective abortions, while other hospitals might not grant them to out-of-state physicians who travel to work at the clinic, Jackson Women's Health Organization. As of Friday, the final business day before the new law takes effect, physicians at the clinic had applied for admitting privileges but hadn't received them.

Supporters of the new law said they believe it will be safer for a woman who develops complications if the same doctor who does an abortion at a clinic can accompany her to a hospital rather than handing her case over to another physician. The clinic says the admitting privileges are not medically necessary as complications from abortion are rare.

Outside the clinic in the state capital one day last week, at least a dozen people from a local church sang hymns and prayed for an end to [abortion](#). Among them was 51-year-old Patricia Frazier, who showed off a rubber model of a fetus at about 12 weeks' development — about the length of a grown woman's index finger.

"This is all about money. They want your money," Frazier said, nodding toward the clinic.

The state Health Department website shows 2,297 abortions, listed as "induced terminations," were performed in Mississippi in 2010, the most recent year for which statistics were available. The vast majority of those — 2,251 — were performed on [Mississippi](#) residents. The site does not specify how many were done at the clinic and how many were

done in other offices or hospitals.

Clinic operators say almost all the abortions in the state are done in their building.

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