

Reinstatement of abortion law closes Texas clinics

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Dr. Lester Minto stands inside one of the rooms where he has performed abortions for years at the Reproductive Services clinic in Harlingen, Texas, on Friday, Nov. 1, 2013. A third of the abortion clinics in Texas can no longer perform the procedure starting Friday after a federal appeals court allowed most of the state's new abortion restrictions to take effect. Minto continued to see patients Friday for their initial consultation with the hope that legal action will make it possible to perform his patients' abortions on Saturday. (AP Photo/Chris Sherman)

Many pregnant women in Texas are facing limited options after an appeals court allowed most of the state's new abortion restrictions to take effect. The decision effectively barred more than a third of the state's abortion clinics from performing the procedure.

A one clinic, about a dozen women waited Friday to see the doctor, already aware that they would not be able to end their pregnancies there.

If women did not know about the ruling before they arrived at Reproductive Services of Harlingen, clinic administrator Angie Tristan told them. Abortions are a two-day process in Texas. On Fridays, women arrive here for their initial consultation with the doctor. On Saturdays, they return for the procedure.

Despite Tristan's explanation that they would not be able to have abortions on Saturday, some women decided to stay on the slim hope that something would change.

Thursday's ruling made Texas the fourth and largest state to enforce a provision requiring doctors who perform abortions to have admitting privileges in a nearby hospital. In places such as the Rio Grande Valley and rural West Texas, the mandate put hundreds of miles between many women and [abortion](#) providers.

Anti-abortion groups welcomed the [court](#)'s surprise decision, which they insisted would protect women's health.

A panel of judges at the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans ruled that Texas can enforce the law while a lawsuit challenging the restrictions moves forward.

The law that the Legislature passed in July also bans abortions at 20 weeks and, beginning in September 2014, requires doctors to perform all

abortions in surgical facilities.

But it's the provision about admitting privileges that has idled Dr. Lester Minto's hands here in Harlingen, near the Texas-Mexico border.

After the law was adopted, the clinic began preparing to close, shredding old patient records and drawing down their inventory, ordering only enough supplies to keep going for a month at a time.



Kathy Bass, left, her son Justin Bass, and Jin Lee wait to cross the street after holding vigil outside of the Southwestern Women's Surgery Center in Dallas on Friday, Nov. 1, 2013, following a federal appeals court ruling Thursday that allowed most of the state's new abortion restrictions to take effect. While Southwestern will still be able to perform abortions, twelve of the 32 clinics in the state that don't have doctors with admitting privileges at nearby hospitals will not be able to, though they can provide other services. (AP Photo/Rex C. Curry)

Minto, who has been performing abortions for 30 years, predicted the women he sees would take dangerous measures in their desperation. He made clear he would not perform abortions Saturday if they remain prohibited, but he did not rule out taking other steps in the future.

"I'm going to continue helping girls somehow," he said.

Without access to his services, "they'll do drastic things," Minto predicted. "Some, they may even commit suicide."

He said he has seen women take various concoctions hoping to end pregnancies. Others have been beaten by boyfriends who pounded their abdomens with bats.

The communities Minto serves are among the nation's poorest. On top of that, many of his patients cross the border from Mexico, where abortion is illegal in most places. Others live in the U.S. illegally.

If this clinic and one in nearby McAllen are forced to close, women seeking abortions would be faced with taking days off work, finding childcare and paying for hotels in cities such as San Antonio, Austin or Houston.

That's more than many can afford, including a 39-year-old woman from Willacy County who was waiting Friday to see Minto. She spoke on condition of anonymity because she was fearful of the judgment she would face in her small, rural community.

The woman said she and her husband are happily married but already have several children. They're just getting back on their feet financially after her husband recently found work. The pregnancy was not planned.

"I just can't afford to have another one," she said, crying. But the money

to travel north for an abortion isn't there either.



Lee Valerius adds his name to the list of people holding a vigil outside of The Southwestern Women's Surgery Center in Dallas on Friday, Nov. 1, 2013 following a federal appeals court ruling Thursday that allowed most of the state's new abortion restrictions to take effect. While Southwestern will still be able to perform abortions, twelve of the 32 clinics in the state that don't have doctors with admitting privileges at nearby hospitals will not be able to, though they can provide other services. (AP Photo/Rex C. Curry)

"It's so unfair. It's just politics," she said. "It's my decision. It's not anybody else's."

The Supreme Court prohibits legislatures from banning most abortions, acknowledged Joe Pojman, executive director of Texas Alliance for

Life. But, he said in a statement, "[states](#) should have the right to protect women from dangerous abortion procedures."

Texas follows Utah, Tennessee and Kansas in enforcing the admitting privileges law. Similar laws are under temporary court injunctions in Alabama, Wisconsin, North Dakota and Mississippi.

The Supreme Court has ruled in past decisions that lawmakers may not pass laws that would effectively end abortions in a state because that would put an undue burden on women trying to exercise their right to end a pregnancy.

In Thursday's opinion, appellate Judge Priscilla Owen noted that the Texas [law](#) would not end the procedure, only force [women](#) to drive a greater distance to obtain one.

Almost all Republican lawmakers who make up the majority in both chambers of the Texas Legislature are vocally anti-abortion and have repeatedly pledged to try to stop abortion. Gov. Rick Perry has also dedicated himself to making abortion illegal, saying late Thursday that his administration would continue "doing everything we can to protect a culture of life in our state."

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