

Texas considers more abortion limits after clinic closures

April 29 2015, by Paul J. Weber And Eva Ruth Moravec

Two years after Texas adopted sweeping abortion restrictions despite Wendy Davis' star-making filibuster, Republicans are pushing a smaller encore of additional limits for new Gov. Greg Abbott to sign within the next month.

New battlegrounds over abortion access for minors and insurance don't pack the same impact of a 2013 measure that would leave as few as eight abortion facilities in Texas if a federal appeals court upholds stringent new clinic standards. That decision is potentially still weeks out.

But while other conservative states such as Kansas and Tennessee have moved to the front line of national abortion politics, Texas Republicans are signaling they are far from finished.

One bill up for discussion Wednesday would hold doctors or counselors criminally liable if they were found to have coerced a woman into ending a pregnancy. It was proposed by a first-term Republican who says she was pressured into an abortion as a teenager.

Another that advanced to the House floor this week would make it harder for girls under 18 to get approval from a court to have an abortion if they can't get required consent from their parents.

"These little measures that keep slipping through, they cumulatively have a very detrimental effect to safe, legal and timely abortions," said Heather Busby, executive director of NARAL Pro-Choice Texas.

"They've done plenty of damage at this point."

Tension over new abortion laws erupted in June 2013 when Republicans weathered a 13-hour filibuster by Davis, who went on to lose badly to Abbott in the governor's race. New laws required abortion clinics to meet hospital-level operating standards and mandated that doctors who perform abortions obtain hospital admitting privileges.

Clinics unable to make costly upgrades closed and women in rural swaths of Texas now face hours-long drives to the nearest abortion provider. Abortion-rights groups say about 17 clinics are currently open for business in Texas, but that number would plummet by half if the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals sides with the state.

In 2012, Texas had 42 abortion providers.

Now the focus of anti-abortion measures is shifting to women instead of the clinics.

Republican state Rep. Molly White said her bill targeting what she called "coerced" abortions is aimed at protecting women who feel pressured to have an abortion. She said that includes victims of human trafficking, sexual assault victims, women in physically abusive relationships and teenagers whose parents want them to have an abortion.

"I was coerced, unduly pressured, and it was very traumatic," White said. "It was by family, and we've reconciled, but it took 30 something years to get past that."

White made headlines earlier this year when she instructed aides to ask Muslims visiting her office to pledge their allegiance to the U.S. She is part of a bloc of conservative House Republicans who are most aggressively pushing new abortion limits, while Abbott and other

Republican legislative leaders have not made new restrictions a priority.

In some cases, Republicans are trying to align Texas with abortion laws that are already common. One measure advancing would prohibit insurance plans under the Affordable Care Act from covering most abortions, a restriction that two dozen states already have on the books.

The focus of the debate over abortion has shifted this year from Texas to states such as Kansas, where a first-of-its-kind law would ban a common second-trimester abortion procedure. Tennessee is also expected to approve a 48-hour waiting period to get an abortion, double the amount of time that Texas requires.

Abortion rights groups said the current trend in statehouses nationally is to not make new restrictions but make the existing ones tougher.

"We have been seeing clinics closing in some states, but no state has had the same impact as Texas," said Elizabeth Nash, a policy analyst with the Guttmacher Institute, a research organization that supports legal access to [abortion](#).

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