

Oklahoma's first new abortion clinic in 40 years opens doors

September 16 2016, by Sean Murphy

Despite facing some of the nation's strictest anti-abortion laws, a Kansas-based foundation opened a new facility in Oklahoma City—the first new abortion provider in the state in 40 years.

The Trust Women South Wind Women's Center welcomed the first patients last week to its clinic on the city's south side. Six licensed physicians are providing services there, including abortions, OB-GYN care, family planning, adoption and emergency contraception.

"If you look at this part of the country, there is a lack of access to reproductive health care, and frankly a lack of access to health care across the board," Trust Women's founder and CEO Julie Burkhart said Friday. "It's hard for women who want to give birth to find OB-GYNs to help them deliver their babies."

Trust Women says Oklahoma City was the largest metropolitan area in the U.S. without an abortion provider, and the state's last clinic opened in 1974. The only other abortion providers in the state are in Norman and Tulsa.

Dr. Naresh Patel performed abortions for decades at his clinic in the Oklahoma City suburb of Warr Acres before he gave up his license last year as part of a plea deal to fraud charges alleging he sold abortion-inducing drugs to women who weren't actually pregnant.

Trust Women opened its first clinic in Wichita, Kansas, in 2013

following the shooting death of abortion provider Dr. George Tiller, with whom Burkhart worked for seven years.

Burkhart said she expects the Oklahoma clinic will provide about 1,500 abortions in its first year, increasing to as many as 3,000 per year after a few years.

The news of the clinic's opening was disheartening for abortion opponents, said Lorryn McGarry, a spokeswoman for the anti-abortion Holy Innocents Foundation of Oklahoma.

"We are grieved to hear of the abortion industry moving into south Oklahoma City, and we will do all we can to pray for a change of heart for all involved," McGarry said. She said the group did not have any plans to protest outside the clinic.

Oklahoma's Republican-led Legislature has passed some of the most far-reaching anti-abortion bills in the country, including a measure last year that would have made it a felony punishable by up to three years in prison to perform the procedure in Oklahoma. Republican Gov. Mary Fallin vetoed the measure, saying that while she opposes abortion, the bill was vague and would not withstand a legal challenge.

At least five anti-abortion measures approved in recent years face legal challenges, including mandatory waiting periods, requiring abortion providers to have admitting privileges at a nearby hospital and bans on various methods of [abortion](#). Most of the proposed new laws have been temporarily halted while the lawsuits are pending.

According to the Oklahoma State Department of Health, 79,038 abortions were performed on state residents from 2002 to 2015, an average of 5,646 abortions per year. That number peaked in 2006, with 6,807 abortions reported to state health officials. The fewest number of

abortions was recorded last year, with 4,330 abortions.

Overall, the rate of abortions performed in Oklahoma has dropped by 34 percent during that same time period, from 123.5 abortions per 1,000 live births in 2002 to 81.5 abortions per 1,000 live births in 2015, according to Health Department statistics.

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