

S. Carolina agency suspends changes to abortion regulations

November 15 2016, by Seanna Adcox

South Carolina's public health agency is holding off on recommending any changes to abortion clinic regulations after being inundated with responses to its drafted proposal.

The state Department of Health and Environmental Control confirmed Tuesday the process is delayed indefinitely. It received nearly 460 comments on proposed changes put out in September for public review.

Officials had expected to hold a hearing in December and send recommendations to legislators.

"Because of the volume and scope of the comments received during the public commenting period, the agency has decided to take additional time to work through the comments before proceeding further," said spokeswoman Cassie Harris.

There is no new timeline.

Abortion rights advocates praised the department's move.

Suggestions they opposed included requiring doctors who perform abortions to have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals and requiring clinics to meet hospital-like standards for outpatient surgery.

Planned Parenthood, among the organizations that submitted comments on the agency's draft, pointed out the U.S. Supreme Court has already

declared those requirements unconstitutional.

In June, the nation's high court sided with Texas clinics in throwing out a law they argued was an attempt to make it harder to get an [abortion](#). That ruling nullified similar laws in Mississippi, Wisconsin and Alabama.

"The scope of comments makes it evident that South Carolinians are not interested in fighting this battle in our state," said Planned Parenthood regional spokeswoman Vicki Ringer. "We are encouraged by DHEC's decision, and hope that, going forward, the revisions will not be based in politics, but rather reflect the constitutional protections of medical care."

Last month, the agency rewrote the draft after acknowledging mistakes.

Following criticism from abortion rights advocates, the agency said it erred in suggesting that a married woman, if living with her husband, needed his signed consent to have an abortion at a clinic.

State law requires a husband's consent in the third trimester, but such abortions can occur only in hospitals, the agency said in a statement. By law, clinics can perform abortions up to 18 weeks gestation.

It also dropped a proposal to require, instead of offer, certain tests including a pap smear and tests for [sexually transmitted diseases](#).

South Carolina's Republican-controlled Legislature has repeatedly tightened the rules on abortions.

Last spring, Gov. Nikki Haley signed a law banning most abortions at 20 weeks beyond fertilization.

The ban's only exceptions are if the mother's life is in jeopardy or a doctor determines the fetus cannot survive outside the womb. Its

definition of "fetal anomaly" makes it illegal to abort a fetus with a severe disability if the child could live. Such anomalies are generally detected around 20 weeks.

Supporters cited the disputed claim that a fetus can feel pain at 20 weeks. Opponents said later-term abortions usually happen with wanted pregnancies in which complex medical situations arise.

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