

Some state lawmakers seek to protect birth-control access

28 March 2017, by David Crary And Alison Noon



In this Wednesday, March 8, 2017, file photo, Maryland House Speaker Michael Busch speaks at a news conference in Annapolis, Md., in support of legislation to continue funding for services provided by Planned Parenthood. Democratic lawmakers in some states including Maryland are pressing ahead with efforts to protect birth control access, Planned Parenthood funding and abortion coverage in case they are jeopardized in the future. (AP Photo/Brian Witte, File)

Even with the Republican failure to repeal Barack Obama's health care law, Democratic lawmakers in some states are pressing ahead with efforts to protect birth control access, Planned Parenthood funding and abortion coverage in case they are jeopardized in the future.

Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives withdrew a bill last week that would have repealed Obama's Affordable Care Act. It would have halted federal funding for Planned Parenthood and curtailed the ability of many low-income women to obtain affordable birth control.

Despite that setback for the GOP, several Republicans said Congress might revisit [health](#)

care in the future, and anti-abortion leaders have stressed they will not abandon their campaign to defund Planned Parenthood. The group is the No. 1 abortion provider in the U.S. but also offers extensive birth control and health-screening services.

In Nevada, state lawmakers and health advocates say they will continue to promote bills that would allow women to access 12-month supplies of birth control and require all health insurers to cover contraceptives at no extra charge, regardless of religious objections.

Another Nevada proposal seeks to provide alternative funding to help organizations such as Planned Parenthood. Some government-run clinics that rely on federal grants and are on the brink of closure also would benefit.

"Nevadans need these protections regardless of what's happening in Congress," said Elisa Cafferata, president of Nevada Advocates for Planned Parenthood Affiliates. "Family planning and preventative health care are still very much threatened."

Democratic state Sen. Julia Ratti said it was important to establish protections in state law "so that, regardless of what future federal provisions come through, we know we're doing the right thing in Nevada."

It's unclear whether Gov. Brian Sandoval, a Republican, will sign or veto the bills if they reach his desk.

Majority Democrats in the Maryland Legislature, with backing from some Republicans, plan to continue work on a bill that would maintain family planning services provided by Planned Parenthood if the group ever lost federal funding. The measure, which has cleared the House of Delegates and is now pending in the Senate, would direct \$2 million

from Maryland's Medicaid budget to [family planning](#), as well as \$700,000 from the state's general fund.

The bill's chief sponsor, state Delegate Shane Pendergrass, said Maryland would be unwise to assume that congressional Republicans were finished with efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act.

"Could this come back in six months? Maybe," she said. "Do we want to make sure we're prepared if something happens? You bet we do."



In this Saturday, Feb. 11, 2017, file photo, demonstrators gather to counter an anti-Planned Parenthood rally in Kent, Wash. Even with the Republican failure to repeal Barack Obama's health care law, Democratic lawmakers in some states are pressing ahead with efforts to protect birth control access, Planned Parenthood funding and abortion coverage in case they are jeopardized in the future. (Grant Hindsley/seattlepi.com via AP, File)

In Oregon, Democratic state Rep. Jeff Barker said deliberations would continue on a bill he is sponsoring that would require health insurers to cover a full range of services, drugs and products related to reproductive health, including contraceptives, with no co-pay or deductible. It also would ban any government interference in a woman's choice to have an abortion.

"It will be contentious, but I believe it will pass," Barker said. "We want to be sure that women have all their reproductive health needs taken care of."

The bill, which is awaiting referral to a House committee, could be up for a floor vote sometime next month.

"Our plan is to still move it forward," said House Speaker Tina Kotek, a Democrat. "It's really important to a lot of people on this particular area of health care."

Kotek also expressed no interest in tweaking the bill's language to the liking of Providence Health Plans, a Catholic-sponsored organization currently covering 260,000 Oregonians. Last week, Providence threatened to pull out of the Oregon insurance market if the abortion proposal passes.

At the national level, Planned Parenthood celebrated the collapse of the GOP [health care](#) overhaul effort, yet acknowledged that it will remain a target of the anti-abortion movement and its allies.

"We know this is the beginning, not the end," said Planned Parenthood's president, Cecile Richards.

Federal law already prohibits federal money from being used to pay for most abortions, but the now-abandoned GOP health overhaul would have cut off more than \$400 million in Medicaid reimbursements and other [federal funding](#) to Planned Parenthood for non-abortion services. That includes [birth control](#) provided to about 2 million women annually.

Kristi Hamrick of Americans United for Life, in an email, said the push to defund Planned Parenthood would continue.

"Too early to say how this might play out," she wrote.

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