

More abortion restrictions anticipated in US state

July 13 2012, by EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS

(AP) - The owner of Mississippi's only abortion clinic said Thursday she expected legislators to keep trying to put new restrictions on the facility and the procedure, regardless of how a federal judge rules in a fight over a new state law.

"They've made their intent quite clear," Diane Derzis told The Associated Press a day after a federal judge kept a restraining order against the law in place. "They're going to keep coming back. They're not going to be satisfied until they have driven us out of business. I think everybody can see that."

Employees at Jackson Women's Health Organization were still scheduling appointments for women seeking to terminate pregnancies Thursday.

A new law would require anyone who performs abortions at the clinic to be an OB-GYN with privileges to admit patients to a local hospital. The clinic filed a lawsuit June 27 seeking to stop the law, which it says creates unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles that could drive it out of business.

At least nine other states - Alabama, Arizona, Indiana, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee and Utah - require doctors who perform abortions to have admitting privileges in local hospitals, according to NARAL Pro-Choice America, an [abortion](#)-rights group. The states all have at least one abortion clinic.

"This situation is not simply isolated to Mississippi," the group said in a statement. "These politically motivated restrictions are part of a broader attempt to make it even harder for women, especially those who live in rural or under-served areas, to choose abortion care."

Judge Daniel P. Jordan III issued a temporary restraining order to block the measure on July 1, the day it was supposed to take effect.

On Wednesday, Jordan heard two hours of arguments about the clinic's request for a preliminary injunction, which - if granted - would put the law on hold for weeks or months. Jordan extended the temporary restraining order Wednesday but didn't indicate when he might rule on the request for a longer block.

Republican Gov. Phil Bryant said when he signed the bill in April that he wants Mississippi to be "abortion-free." Derzis said Bryant's statement, plus similar comments by Republican Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves, show lawmakers were trying to eliminate access to a constitutionally protected medical procedure.

The law's sponsor, Republican Sam Mims of McComb, is chairman of the House Public Health Committee. He said Thursday that the measure was intended to protect women's safety.

Derzis said the two out-of-state OB-GYNs who work at the clinic have applied to Jackson-area hospitals but have received no response. The clinic's attorneys told Jordan there's no way to know when, or even if, the hospitals will consider the requests.

Admitting privileges can be difficult to obtain. Some hospitals won't issue them to out-of-state physicians, while hospitals that are affiliated with religious groups might not want to associate with anyone who does elective abortions.

The clinic says its physicians do almost all of the roughly 2,000 abortions that are performed in Mississippi each year. If Mississippi physicians perform 10 or fewer abortions a month, or 100 or fewer a year, they can avoid having their offices regulated as abortion facilities.

As the head of Personhood Mississippi, Les Riley of Pontotoc was active in a 2011 effort to amend Mississippi's constitution to declare that life begins when a human egg is fertilized. The proposed constitutional amendment failed in the November election. Riley often prays outside the abortion clinic in Jackson, and he said in a phone interview Thursday that he wants lawmakers to continue pushing ways to regulate abortion.

"I think anything that legislators can do to make medical practices safer in Mississippi for patients, they ought to do," Riley said. "Ultimately, our focus is answering the question of whether the unborn child is a human being."

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