



Judge Rules Against Planned Parenthood in Oklahoma

A federal judge ruled December 24 that the state of Oklahoma is within its rights to end a government nutrition program that abortion giant Planned Parenthood has been providing to low-income mothers and children in Tulsa for the past 18 years. The Oklahoma State Department of Health told Planned Parenthood in September it would end the relationship it had with three Tulsa-area Planned Parenthood clinics that had administered the federal Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) nutrition program, pointing to uncertainty in federal funding, as well as declining caseloads and a higher cost-per-participant rate at the three clinics.



The Health Department noted that this year the clinics received a total of \$454,000 to provide WIC services and averaged about 3,000 visits from mothers and their children per month, or about 18 percent of all WIC client visits in Tulsa County, according to Health Department records.

Planned Parenthood had filed suit to block the termination, arguing that the move was politically motivated. But U.S. District Judge Stephen Friot ruled that while the state's reasons for dropping Planned Parenthood might appear to be insufficient, Planned Parenthood had not demonstrated that those reasons were political in nature and related to the group's abortion business.

Friot wrote that Planned Parenthood's drop in case load and other performance shortfalls did not of themselves seem to warrant the state's decision to cut ties with the group. But, he added in his decision, "a routine, solvable problem can become a justifiable basis for strong action when it is compounded by persistent unresponsiveness in addressing the challenge."

Jill June, CEO of Planned Parenthood of the Heartland, said that the state's decision will likely mean that the abortion giant will be forced to close one of its Tulsa clinics and eliminate six staff positions when the state contract ends December 31. "We are truly disappointed with today's court ruling and the impact it will have on the women and children in the Tulsa area who have relied on Planned Parenthood for [WIC] and the many other services we provide," June said in a statement. "While we are convinced of our claim, we will weigh all our possible options going forward."

In the suit, Planned Parenthood contended that the reasons the state decided not to renew its contract with the group was tied to its abortion business, which it pointed out is not part of the service provided at the three Tulsa locations. But the [Associated Press](#) reported that Terry Cline, the state's health commissioner, testified that the group's abortion activities were not a factor in the decision. "Cline and other Health Department administrators have said the contracts weren't renewed because of a variety of long-term managerial and administrative problems, including a decline in caseloads, increasing client costs and a failure to resolve budgetary questions," reported AP.

A spokesperson for the state attorney general's office, which represented the Health Department, applauded the ruling, saying that "Judge Friot looked at the facts of the case and understood that the



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decision by the Health Department was based on legitimate business reasons.”

Terry Bryce, the chief of the state health department’s WIC Services division, confirmed that it was a “business decision” based in part on “performance factors” that led the state to sever ties with Planned Parenthood’s involvement with WIC. “The decision was a collective decision within the agency based on the agency’s need, the contractor’s performance, and funding availability,” Bryce said.

June retorted, “I thought the program was about the needs of women and children. We’re going to stand and fight to continue providing these services.” She added that “it’s hard enough right now for young mothers and children to deal with economic hardships. To have this kind of heartless disruption of services for reasons that don’t add up — I do fear that this is politically motivated. Women should not be the target of political gamesmanship.”

But Bryce pointed out that the remaining 14 clinics in Tulsa County that provide WIC services are sufficient to absorb the case load of the Planned Parenthood facilities. “We have existing WIC clinics in close proximity to all three of these locations,” Bryce said.

Over the past year, Planned Parenthood has been targeted by legislatures in several states eager to dull its influence. In virtually every case the abortion giant has fought back in the courts, with liberal judges overturning state defunding laws in several cases. For example, noted the AP, in early 2011 Indiana passed the first significant law to block Planned Parenthood from receiving state funding, “but a federal appeals court in October upheld a lower court’s finding that Indiana violated federal regulations when it enacted the law.” Similarly a federal judge blocked Arizona from implementing its funding ban of the abortion giant.

And in Texas, “the GOP-controlled legislature passed a law last year that sought to exclude Planned Parenthood clinics that provide family planning and health services to poor women as part of the Texas Women’s Health Program,” reported AP. In response, “federal authorities announced they would cut off funding that accounts for 90 percent of the program’s family-planning costs and half of its administrative costs.”

While Texas tried to block the funding cut, continued the AP report, “a federal judge ... sided with federal authorities, who say the state’s exclusion of Planned Parenthood violates U.S. Department of Health and Human Services guidelines.”



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