

The Last Abortion Clinic

In a campaign to reduce the number of abortions in the United States, groups opposed to abortion are using state laws to regulate the procedures and limit access to the clinics. As a result, there has been a great decline in the number of facilities and physicians conducting abortions. In Mississippi, only one abortion clinic is left, fighting to remain open.

Pro-life Mississippi, founded in 1984, has helped to close down five abortion clinics in the state. Its goal is to make Mississippi the first abortion-free state in the nation. In a 2005 PBS Frontline interview, Terri Herring, president of Pro-life Mississippi, suggested that only one Mississippi abortion clinic remains because “people have persistently and continually said that we do not want abortion in Mississippi. And so when it's known that there's one there, people are faithful to be there when the doors are open, and it makes it very uncomfortable. And I think it should be uncomfortable to go in someplace and kill your unborn baby.”¹

Mississippi women who choose to have an abortion can either go to the Jackson Women's Health Organization (JWHO) or travel to a neighboring state. The abortion clinic in one neighboring state receives hundreds of calls, and some women must travel over 200 miles to receive care. Access to transportation poses a problem for women who travel such long distances. The city of Clarksdale is one of the poorest cities in Mississippi, and 75% of the infants born there are born to single, teenage mothers living in poverty. Patricia White, a nurse midwife at the public health clinic, said, “A lot of the girls come in pregnant because they didn't have access to birth control... Most of the girls have no option except to have the baby.” Many girls cannot afford to get an abortion, and most of them do not have health insurance. In 2002, Mississippi prohibited government funding to pay for abortion procedures except in cases of rape, incest, or risk of death.²

Groups opposed to abortion, like Pro-Life Mississippi and Operation Save America, have been advocating for laws to hinder access to abortion care and have been intimidating patients at JWHO. If these organizations successfully close this last abortion clinic in Mississippi, it will become almost impossible for many women to exercise their established federal rights, despite the existence of those legal rights. Dr. Willie Parker, a doctor at JWHO, asserted, “Any attempt to block a woman's right to be self-determining when it comes to procreation is absolutely an assault on the integrity and the autonomy and the humanity of women.”³

Study Questions:

1. Is it permissible for government funding to be provided to clinics that perform abortions and/or for abortion procedures?
2. Should laws that impede our ability to exercise our right to govern our own bodies be allowed? Is abortion a special case?
3. Would it be acceptable for a state to not have any abortion clinics?
4. Should a state be required to sponsor an abortion clinic even in cases where most citizens of that state oppose the practice?

¹<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/clinic/interviews/herring.html>

²<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/clinic/etc/script.html>

³<http://truth-out.org/opinion/item/19723-dr-willie-parker-doctor-at-the-last-abortion-clinic-in-mississippi>

