

WOMEN'S LAW PROJECT

Safeguarding Rights, Creating Opportunities

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WOMEN'S ADVOCATES CALL MENSCH AMENDMENT TO SENATE ABORTION LICENSING BILL A "PUBLIC HEALTH CATASTROPHE"

Stating that it will "lead to Gosnell-style illegal abortion practices arising all over Pennsylvania," women's health advocates reacted angrily to an amendment by Senator Bob Mensch (R-24) to Senate Bill 732, which would require abortion providers to become ambulatory surgical centers or be closed down. The Senate adopted the amendment today by a vote of 31-19.

"Anti-abortion forces are exploiting the tragedy suffered by women at Gosnell's clinic to attack and close down Pennsylvania's excellent providers of abortion care," charged Carol Tracy, executive director of the Women's Law Project.

The Mensch Amendment would create a "public health crisis," according to senior staff attorney Susan Frietsche, by requiring freestanding clinics to re-equip, re-model, and re-staff themselves to meet the requirements of ambulatory surgical centers, which are facilities where riskier, more invasive surgeries of up to four hours' duration take place. In contrast, most abortion procedures are performed in 7 to 15 minutes and carry less risk than wisdom teeth removal.

"The Mensch Amendment would force safe abortion providers to do hundreds of thousands of dollars, possibly millions of dollars, of construction upgrades and staffing upgrades for no legitimate medical reason and with no safety benefit for women," said Frietsche. "These changes would include hiring fulltime nurses to supervise recovery rooms even on days when no abortions are being performed and increasing the size of procedure rooms to two or three times their current size for no medical reason."

The likely impact of the Mensch Amendment would be to close many of the 20 existing freestanding abortion providers in Pennsylvania, forcing women seeking abortions to resort to hospital-based care.

Frietsche explained that closing down all but hospital-based abortion care would be catastrophic for women because of the much higher costs of hospital procedures (thousands of dollars compared to \$350 on average for an early clinic-based procedure), coupled with the failure of Medicaid and many insurance plans to cover abortion. "If you wanted to invent the perfect plan for driving more women to seek out cheap, illegal, unsafe practitioners, the Mensch amendment would be that plan," she concluded.

About the Women's Law Project:

The Women's Law Project, with offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, PA, creates a more just and equitable society by advancing the rights and status of all women throughout their lives. To this end, we engage in high-impact litigation, advocacy, and education.

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