

Wide Nets Cast on Abortion

Lawmakers target federal aid to any service providers with abortion ties

As several state legislatures consider how to siphon federal grant money from abortion providers, other women's health and advocacy groups, including state and county health departments, are finding some of their funding is also endangered because lawmakers are declaring them guilty by association.

Kentucky, Ohio and South Carolina lawmakers are considering legislation that would cut off federally funded state support for women's health centers, advocacy groups and agencies that provide abortions or even refer patients to abortion providers. Federal funds may not be used to pay for abortions, but they have not previously been denied to facilities that provide them as long as the money is used for other purposes.

Bill Patmon, a Democratic state representative in Ohio who is co-sponsoring such legislation, says his bill is meant to keep tax dollars from being used for abortions, not to prevent women from getting them. He says the legislation allows \$1.3 million to be redistributed from groups such as Planned Parenthood that sometimes provide abortions or make referrals to providers to those that address other public health issues like infant mortality and HIV/AIDS.

"We are failing woefully in the areas that are funding these activities," Patmon says, adding "there's no evidence through



PRESSURE POINT:
Anti-abortion activist Brian Normile protests in Beaver Creek, Ohio.

Alex Wong/Getty Images

All groups that receive federal funding must be wary of new state requirements

[Planned Parenthood] participation that things are getting better for women and minorities."

Republican-led state legislatures have stepped up efforts to defund Planned Parenthood after a series of videos released last summer by the anti-abortion Center for Medical Progress showed employees explaining how they extract aborted fetal tissue for medical research. While the videos have since been found to be heavily edited, Planned Parenthood and its

funding streams have come under closer scrutiny.

Ohio's bill, according to Mary Harned, an attorney for the anti-abortion group Americans United for Life, prevents abortion providers from "establishing a scheme where a grantee of tax dollars simply refers or encourages a client considering abortion to visit their affiliate to obtain an abortion."

Still, Ohio public health advocates say the bill's idea of "promoting abortion" is a fiscal

roadblock for local health departments and federally qualified health centers.

Women's health providers and advocacy groups that help sexual assault and domestic violence survivors in the state stand to lose access to five pots of federal money if they make abortion referrals. This includes money that would normally help domestic violence survivors; breast and cervical cancer prevention; infertility prevention; HIV/AIDS screening and treatment for minorities; and abstinence and contraception education for teens.

Kelli Hykes, director of public health policy at Columbus

Public Health, the city's health department, says that in a worst-case scenario the agency could lose more than \$10 million in funding. Hykes says the bill still affects their funding because of their relationship with hospitals that perform abortions and insurance companies that may be billed for such procedures.

"We still have to do the work, and I don't know how we do that work without state funding," Hykes says.

She also says advocates are worried that lawmakers haven't considered such impacts on patient services or offered assurances that other organizations will apply to the state for newly available grant money to address women's health needs.

Kentucky lawmakers are considering a bill that would cut \$5.6 million in federal family-planning funds from abortion providers and organizations that make referrals to them. In South Carolina, lawmakers are using draft legislation written by Americans United for Life that would do the same thing.

States are showing increased interest in abortion-related services such as counseling and referrals, says Elizabeth Nash, senior state issues associate at the Guttmacher Institute, a group that studies and advocates for reproductive health services. She says Indiana and Michigan passed similar legislation years ago, although Indiana's law has an exception for hospitals.

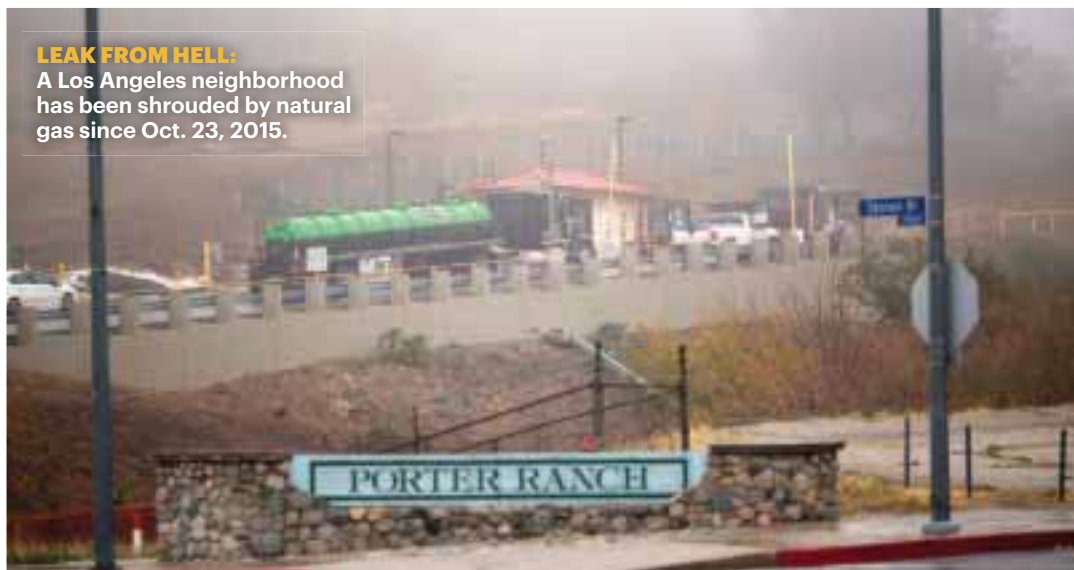
Regardless, groups that receive federal funding have to be wary of their state's new requirements or risk losing funding.

"These organizations are under such scrutiny that they don't want to buck the system," Nash says. "It's important if they take the funds they do everything that they're supposed to do."

— Marissa Evans

Stepping on the Gas

LEAK FROM HELL:
A Los Angeles neighborhood has been shrouded by natural gas since Oct. 23, 2015.



David McNew/AFP/Getty Images

As state and federal officials puzzle over how to plug a massive gas leak in Los Angeles, the incident is shining new light on an old problem: State regulations on underground natural gas storage facilities are inconsistent, while comprehensive federal standards don't exist.

The problem leaves about half of the underground natural gas storage facilities in the country with portions that are unregulated. That's because it's solely the responsibility of the federal government to oversee facilities involved in interstate transportation of gas — or about half of the roughly 400 underground gas storage facilities in the U.S. States regulate storage sites only involved in intrastate transport.

So while states have established regulations for underground storage facilities, whether they apply depends on how the gas is being transported — creating a regulatory gap. Determining whether gas

is used within the state or out of state is also a complicated process.

When Kansas tried to regulate all storage facilities after a fatal explosion in 2001, it was met with a gas company lawsuit that resulted in a 2010 ruling that state rules were pre-empted by federal authority and could not apply to interstate facilities.

That leaves Kansas officials and their representatives in Congress eager for the federal government to act. Fortunately for them, movement in Congress and in the Obama administration suggests this regulatory environment will change.

Marie Therese Dominguez, who heads the federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, announced Feb. 2 that the agency was working to propose new regulations outlining additional safety standards.

Currently, the agency only has standards in place for the

portions of underground storage facility components that are above the ground, such as the pipeline that services the facility or other above-ground valves. According to the agency, any underground storage facility standards established in the future would apply to both interstate and intrastate facilities. However, states could establish more stringent regulations for intrastate facilities in addition to the federal standards.

Agency action comes as Congress is considering legislation as well.

Two California Democrats, Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, were successful in amending an energy bill (S 2012) on Feb. 2 to establish a seven-member task force headed by Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz that would be tasked with studying the regulatory issues.

"This is a public health and public safety issue that's critical