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Flossmoor Planned Parenthood prepares for increase in patients

BY NICK ULANOWSKI
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The Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion, *Roe v. Wade*, was overturned in a 6-3 decision on June 24. That decision leads to “trigger laws” in 26 states – including four states bordering Illinois. Missouri and Kentucky will put a total ban on abortion in 30 days.

Illinois state law grants citizens the fundamental right to an abortion by way of the Reproductive Health Act that Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed in 2019.

Mary Jane Maharry, publicist and senior marketing manager for Planned Parenthood of Illinois, said with *Roe v. Wade* overturned, the organization is expecting an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 additional patients annually traveling from out of state for abortions.

To compare, in 2020, there were 46,243 abortions in Illinois and only 9,686 were out of state patients, according to the Illinois Department of Health.

During the first five months of this year, Planned Parenthood’s facility in Flossmoor already has experienced an increase of 15 to 20 abortion patients every month, according to Batriz Gonzalez, the lead reproductive health assistant at Planned Parenthood in Flossmoor.

“We started seeing an increase on Jan. 1, and we are expecting more of an increase,” Gonzalez said.

To prepare, Planned Parenthood in Flossmoor has increased the number of days that abortion services are provided. It has expanded its family planning services which include pap smears, birth control visits, sexually transmitted infection or disease testing, gender affirming care for transgender individuals and free condoms.

Additionally, Planned Parenthood of Illinois has moved to a larger space in Chicago’s Loop to accommodate more out-of-state abortion patients, Maharry said. It’s located at 16 North Wabash Avenue.

“We just started offering medication abortion through telehealth and then mailing the medication to qualified patients with an Illinois address,” Maharry said. This “opens up the appointments in the health centers for patients that are maybe traveling.”

According to Maharry, Planned Parenthood opened its Flossmoor location in 2018 because it was near Indiana, and the neighboring state was already preparing for an end to *Roe v. Wade*.

In Flossmoor, Aid for Women is next door to Planned Parenthood. Aid for Women is an anti-abortion healthcare center that, according to its website, provides “free pregnancy testing and ultrasounds (to) help determine viability and dates.”

Anti-abortion protesters frequently can be seen on Governors Highway near the parking lot entrance to both health centers.

On a recent, sunny afternoon, John Ryan, an Oak Lawn resident and an anti-abortion activist with Coalition Life, was holding a sign that said “Check in Here” in large enough letters to be visible to those in passing cars. In much smaller letters below it, the sign said, “for free information about pregnancy care centers, counseling and other medical care.”

With *Roe v. Wade* overturned, Coalition Life will “ramp up our presence in front of abortion clinics” in Illinois, Ryan said.

While Ryan doesn’t work for Aid for Women, he said he was trying to divert patients away from Planned Parenthood and towards Aid for Women.

Claire Smith, an H-F graduate who works in Homewood, said she’s seen the same “Check in Here” sign before. She said when she noticed it, there were two men standing by the sign.

“It was kind of creepy and upsetting. Who are these old men – or anyone for that matter – to interfere with women seeking healthcare, to interfere with their bodily autonomy?” Smith said.

To prepare for increased protests, Planned Parenthood in Flossmoor is expanding its clinic escort services, Maharry said. Clinic escorts are Planned Parenthood employees who walk patients safely from their cars to inside the building.

With the Supreme Court decision “our services will be even more vital to assisting those women in Chicagoland more than ever before,” said Susan Barrett, executive director of Aid for Women. “An abortion never solves a problem. We look forward to the day when both our law and our culture recognize that life begins at conception and that every human life has dignity and value and should be protected in the law.”

“Abortion is safe and legal and will remain so in Illinois,” Maharry said. “We do everything in our power to make sure our patients get the healthcare they need and deserve.”