

Open Letter from Missouri & National Health Workers: Keep St. Louis Planned Parenthood Open

Randall W. Williams, Director of the Missouri Department of Health & Human Services:

As health professionals, we understand that access to preventive care, family planning and contraception, safe and legal abortions, and a full range of comprehensive reproductive health services and information are of critical importance to protecting and promoting health and well-being. As civil servants, health care providers, and public health workers, we stand together in opposition to the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services' attempts to close the state's last remaining licensed abortion clinic.

The American Public Health Association, the nation's preeminent and largest public health professional association, agrees that "access to the full range of reproductive health services, including abortion, is a fundamental right." The purpose of the field of public health is to uphold health for all. This includes advancing and protecting bodily autonomy, the right to health care, as well as economic equality and social justice. As such, abortion care and the full spectrum of reproductive health services are vital tenants of health care and of public health.

Closing the St. Louis Planned Parenthood clinic will have dire public health ramifications. First and most importantly, closure would threaten the health and well-being of Missouri residents. As a leading provider of reproductive health care in the state of Missouri and the sole remaining abortion provider, Planned Parenthood provides needed care to all who seek it, regardless of ability to pay, insurance status, citizenship status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The absence of these services will be particularly felt by communities who already bear a disproportionate risk of negative health outcomes. Uninsured and underinsured residents of our state rely on the safety net these services provide. People of color, who after generations of systemic and institutional racism bear the highest risk of maternal and infant mortality, and individuals who identify as LGBTQIA, may struggle to find respectful, affirming care — something everybody deserves. Those who are already in closest proximity to the harms of racism, sexism, homo/queerphobia, transphobia, and xenophobia will be left with fewer, or no, options to obtain needed treatments and services.

Second, the impacts of closing the clinic will reverberate throughout the entire Missouri healthcare system. Those denied vital services there will seek care elsewhere, and will need to be absorbed by the state's already strained health systems. Closing and defunding Planned Parenthood clinics puts tremendous strain on remaining health infrastructures, resulting in skyrocketing increases in demand on other clinics and providers, increases in delays of treatment, and overall decreases in treatment capacity. A 2012 study on the health system impacts of defunding Planned Parenthood in Texas found one county in that state saw an overnight 531% increase in service requests overnight, for example.

Missouri has among the poorest maternal health and birth outcomes in the United States, which in turn falls behind many other wealthy nations. Further restricting access to care under such circumstances is unconscionable. We demand that the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services abide by public health evidence and principles and keep the St. Louis Planned Parenthood clinic open to serve Missouri residents seeking care, education, and services.

Signed,

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