

Kansas, Virginia join states passing new restrictions on abortion

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Kansas and Virginia have joined the growing list of states that this year have passed new restrictions on abortion.

Kansas lawmakers passed a bill declaring that life begins "at fertilization" and which bans sex-selection abortions.

"Unborn children have interests in life, health and well-being that should be protected," said the bill, which Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback, a Republican, has said he will sign.

In Virginia, the state's Board of Health gave its approval by an 11-2 vote Friday on new regulations for abortion clinics.

Among the new regulations are mandatory state inspection of clinics, and architectural requirements to match those of newly constructed hospitals.

The Virginia Catholic Conference, the public policy arm of the state's bishops, issued a "Victory Alert!" Friday in which it said, "Since abortion operates under the guise of health care in this country, the abortion industry must be properly regulated for the safety of Virginia women."

The regulations are an outgrowth of a 2011 law passed by Virginia lawmakers giving the Board of Health the authority to regulate clinics.

"The abortion industry in the commonwealth (of Virginia) has proven unable to self-regulate. The countless health violations that turned up in recent inspections speak volumes," said a statement Friday from Virginia Podboy, associate director of the Virginia Catholic Conference. "Virginia women deserve clean, sanitary facilities that are staffed with trained individuals and prepared with life-saving equipment."

The Board of Health last year had decided to exempt existing clinics -- there are 20 in the state -- from the building regulations. But state Attorney General Kenneth Cuccinelli II, a Republican who is now running for governor, ruled the exemptions were illegal under the terms of the 2011 law, adding that board members could find themselves personally responsible for legal fees if they were sued over their decision.

After the board reversed itself following Cuccinelli's ruling, Dr. Karen Remley, the state health commissioner, resigned in protest.

In Kansas, the state's Catholic conference had testified in support of bill there in February.

"Ours is a generation that looks upon unborn children in the womb through the marvel of 4-D sonograms and has no doubt that we are seeing a baby, and yet many of these same people go about their lives untroubled by the fact that there are 1.2 million abortions per year," said Michael Schuttloffel, Kansas Catholic Conference executive director, in Feb. 11 testimony to the Kansas Senate's Public Health and Welfare Committee.

"We will undoubtedly be told that the right to specifically target an unborn child for destruction purely because she is female must (be) protected in the name of women's rights," Schuttloffel added. "With this Orwellian claim, the profound moral confusion of the abortion advocacy movement is laid bare."

Other provisions of the Kansas bill ban tax breaks for abortion providers and prevent them from furnishing materials or instructor for sex education classes in public schools.

Earlier this year, Arkansas banned most abortions after the 12th week of pregnancy, and North Dakota barred abortions as early as the sixth week of pregnancy.

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