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Bishop: New California laws mean big jump in number of abortions

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New California laws allowing non-physicians to perform abortions and repealing some building regulations that govern abortion clinics "dramatically increase the availability of abortion" in the state, said the president of the California Catholic Conference.

"We oppose abortion, and until it becomes illegal, we will oppose measures which expand it -- especially when it is at the expense of the girls and women undergoing the procedure," said Auxiliary Bishop Gerald Wilkerson of Los Angeles.

On Oct. 9, Gov. Jerry Brown signed into law a measure that permits a nurse practitioner, certified nurse-midwife or physician assistant "to perform an abortion by aspiration techniques during the first trimester of pregnancy." These non-physician medical professionals must complete "specified training" and comply with "specified standardized procedures or protocols."

"This change in the law will effectively create a two-tier health system," Wilkerson said in a statement released Oct. 9 by the Sacramento-based conference, the public policy arm of the Catholic bishops.

"Physician assistants, nurse practitioners and nurse midwives -- with eight week's training -- can now perform first trimester abortions in primary care clinics not designed for surgery," the bishop said. "Most of their clients will be women and girls who are poor, whereas women and girls with means will seek out physicians with surgical skills and hospital-admitting privileges for their abortions."

Brown also signed into law a bill that repeals certain regulations and sections of the California Building Standards Code that treat primary clinics differently depending on whether the clinics provide abortion services.

Wilkerson said the bishops were disappointed with both measures becoming law in their state, where "12 percent of Americans reside but 29 percent of all the nation's abortions occur."

"The often-repeated mantra of those supporting abortions rights is that abortions ought to be safe, legal and rare," he said. "With this change in California's law, abortions are merely legal -- no longer safe. We pray for the day when abortion is no longer legal."

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