

Nashville's shuttering of women's health clinic leaves only one abortion facility in the city

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The closure of one of only two abortion clinics in Nashville could force poor and working class women to travel almost 600 miles round trip to obtain an abortion. In mid-August, the Women's Center announced recently that it would close its 419 Welshwood Drive offices, leaving only five such clinics remaining in the state of Tennessee.

The closure leaves only one remaining clinic performing abortion services in Tennessee's most populous city. For women seeking an abortion, it was reported on August 16 that the waiting period for an appointment at Nashville's Planned Parenthood was nearly two weeks.

The clinic's attorney, Thomas Jessee, told the *Tennessean* newspaper that women were being referred to clinics in Bristol and Knoxville, located in the far eastern part of the state. Knoxville is about 180 miles away with a driving time of six hours roundtrip, while Bristol is about 300 miles away, requiring nine hours roundtrip.

Francine Hunt, executive director of Advocates for Planned Parenthood, told the newspaper that the closing of the Nashville clinic is a sliver of the larger picture of reductions in general healthcare. "We see this as a small part of an overarching healthcare issue, but it is notable that it is particularly pointed at women," Hunt said. "Without a doubt, women's health is an absolute target right now in the healthcare arena."

According to the Guttmacher Institute, as of 2014, 60 percent of women seeking an abortion were in their 20s while 86 percent were unmarried. Fifty-nine percent of such seekers had one or more children. Strikingly but not unexpectedly, the institute found that 75 percent in the study were economically "disadvantaged."

Significantly, no racial or ethnic group made up a majority: Some 39 percent of women obtaining abortions were white, 28 percent were black, 25 percent were Hispanic and 9 percent were of other racial or ethnic backgrounds.

According to a *Marketwatch* report in July, "More than 27 cities across the U.S. qualify as 'abortion deserts,' meaning people there need to travel more than 100 miles to get an abortion."

"Travel costs money, so do hotel rooms," Elizabeth Nash, a "state issues" expert with Guttmacher said of closures in neighboring Kentucky: "Not everybody gets paid time off. Essentially, you would be losing out on earning money. It balloons."

A woman from Nashville in need of an abortion would have to make an appointment for the clinic in Knoxville; a three-hour drive. After confirming an appointment for the procedure, the patient must wait a mandatory 48 hours. After the procedure, the patient must take a couple of days to recover. In all, the process could take up to a week or more. If the patient does not have proof of pregnancy done through blood work, this could add a few more days to the process as the blood work results are analyzed at the clinic.

Many jobs do not offer paid time off and require advance notice of time off needed. Many women who need abortions do so because of the lack of resources to raise a child. Not only is an abortion an expensive procedure, the financial cost of taking off from work and traveling can be a severe financial burden.

According to Guttmacher, the following restrictions on abortion were in effect in Tennessee as of May 1, 2018:

- "A woman must receive state-directed counseling

and then wait 48 hours before the procedure is provided. Counseling must be provided in person and must take place before the waiting period begins, thereby necessitating two trips to the facility.”

- Health plans offered in the state’s health exchange under the Affordable Care Act may not provide coverage of abortion.

- The use of telemedicine to administer medication abortion is prohibited.

- The parent of a minor must consent before an abortion is provided.

- Public funding is provided for abortion operations only in situations involving “life endangerment, rape or incest.”

A state bill passed in May 2017 requires that a pregnant woman undergo a test for fetal viability and gestational age before an abortion may be allowed. A doctor that violates the law faces up to 15 years imprisonment. Tennessee state law does not properly define what terms such as “fetal viability” mean, leaving the results of such tests subject to political bias.

As Tennessee shuts its facilities serving primarily the poor and working class, Nashville/Davidson County is awash in corporations making money in providing healthcare services.

According to *Becker's Hospital Review* 2016, six of the top ten for-profit healthcare corporations in the nation are either in Metropolitan Nashville/Davidson County or in Williamson County, the richest county in the state and adjacent to Metro Nashville.

“The Nashville area is a health-care hub, with more than 400 health-care organizations and 250,000 jobs connected to health care throughout the region,” boasted the website liviability.com. “From pioneering research to medical device innovation, life sciences discovery taking place in Tennessee is having an impact around the world ... More than 1,700 life sciences businesses and organizations operate in the state, among them such household names as Johnson & Johnson, Merck, GlaxoSmithKline, Smith & Nephew, Medtronic and DeRoyal.”

Nashville has slavishly given hundreds of millions of dollars in tax breaks to corporations while Meharry/General Hospital, the “charity” hospital for the destitute and poor, struggles to stay open. The city’s previous mayor sought unsuccessfully to have the hospital turned into an out-patient clinic.

While this was happening, the city agreed to give Opryland Resorts an almost \$14 million tax break to build a \$90 million water theme park only open to hotel guests of the Resorts hotel. As the WSWs reported in June, the tax gifts to healthcare corporations, including for items such as luxury office furniture, are just as obscene.

Despite billions of dollars in healthcare investment and dozens of hospitals in Nashville and surrounding counties, poor and working class women are limited to a single, small clinic for elective abortions.



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