
Prop 5: Protecting Women's Reproductive Rights

Prop. 5 Protects Personal Reproductive Liberty

The Vermont Medical Society supports Prop 5, as this proposed amendment to the Vermont Constitution would protect the legal right of Vermont patients to the full range of evidence-based, reproductive health care in alignment with a patient's needs and goals. This proposal would recognize a patient's fundamental right and liberty to make their own health care decisions without governmental interference. For over 45 years, Vermonters have had the autonomy to make family-planning decisions regarding abortion along with other decisions regarding pregnancy, infertility treatment, contraception and the treatment of sexually transmitted diseases. Once adopted, this proposal will safeguard the sanctity of the relationship between a patient and their health care professional and will keep reproductive health care decisions as private discussions between patients and healthcare practitioners.

Background Information about Abortion Health Care in Vermont

Vermont Abortion Rates

Overall, Vermont has seen a downward trend in state abortion rates since the 1980s, which generally follows the national trend. According to [the Vermont Department of Health 2016 Vital Records](#) (this is the most recent VT data on abortion, p.125-141) there were 1,298 abortions performed in Vermont in 2016. In 2016, 69.3 percent of all Vermont abortions were for pregnancies of less than 9 weeks duration and 91.7 percent of all Vermont abortions happened within the first trimester (12 weeks or less). The highest percentage of abortions in 2016 occurred in Vermonters between the ages of 25-29. Only 1 Vermonter less than 15 years old had an abortion, and only 48 abortions occurred in Vermonters under the age of 18.

Regulatory Standards

Only 17 or 1.3 percent of Vermont abortions occurred in 2016 after 21 weeks and there are no health care practitioners in Vermont that perform elective abortions after 23 weeks. Terminating any pregnancy is an extremely difficult, deeply personal decision. Abortions needed later in pregnancy often involve severe, medical implications for either the mother or the fetus and is a complex decision for the women, physicians and families involved. Such decisions in Vermont frequently involve multi-disciplinary ethics consultations. Physicians enter such decisions not only considering ethical considerations but bound by medical standards of care on individual, state, federal and institutional levels. Physicians who fail to "to conform to the essential standards of acceptable and prevailing practice" can be subject to discipline by the Vermont Board of Medical Practice. 26 V.S.A. § 1354 (b) (2). And the failure to deliver health care with the same degree of care and skill that is ordinarily possessed and exercised in like cases by professionals in the same general line of practice is medical malpractice. 12 V.S.A. § 1908. So, called "partial birth abortions" are specifically prohibited by the 2003 "Partial Birth Abortion Act," which is federal law.

Voluntary clinician involvement

Facilities that offer termination services in Vermont allow staff to choose whether to participate in any medical care that may for a variety of reasons not be in alignment with their core values and beliefs. Proposition 5 would not impact those policies. Federal statutes also protect health care professional conscience rights and prohibit recipients of certain federal funds from discriminating against health care providers who choose not to participate in the delivery of abortion related health care services.

Please Support Prop 5

Leading national medical societies support access to the full range of reproductive health services. According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, “The benefits of contraception, named as one of the 10 great public health achievements of the 20th century by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, are widely recognized and include improved health and well-being, reduced global maternal mortality, health benefits of pregnancy spacing for maternal and child health, female engagement in the work force, and economic self-sufficiency for women. Further, “when restrictions are placed on abortion access, women’s health suffers.” If Prop 5 is adopted by the voters of Vermont, it will continue Vermont’s tradition of non-government interference in private, medical decisions about reproductive health care. It will allow doctors to use their best judgement when practicing medicine and protect patients’ access to evidence-based health care services.