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# Widespread bans won't bring end to abortion

## Experts fear limits driving Texans to desperate lengths

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Nine months after Texas enacted a law restricting abortion access across the state, officials at Care Net Pregnancy Center in Waco have their hands full.

The Christian-affiliated pregnancy center expanded its coverage area from McLennan County to seven counties during the COVID-19 pandemic. If the Supreme Court votes soon to overturn Roe v. Wade's protection of access to abortion nationwide, Care Net Director Deborah McGregor expects they will be even busier.

"If you have less abortions, then you're going to have more women having babies that don't want to or didn't think they were prepared," McGregor said. "And that is a real concern for me."

About 26 states are poised to pass laws restricting abortion if Roe is overturned, as expected, said David Cohen, a law professor at Drexel University and author of the book "Obstacle Course: The Everyday Struggle to Get an Abortion in America."

"We are now probably a month away from a really drastic change in American law," Cohen said.

He said under the new Texas law that advanced as Senate Bill 8, called a "heartbeat bill," abortions only dropped by about 10%, citing Texas Policy Evaluation Project data compiled into a chart by The New York Times.

He said the other 90% adapted by traveling out of state or taking abortion pills earlier in their pregnancies.

"The reason people were able to travel outside of Texas is because Louisiana, Oklahoma, Kansas, Arkansas and New Mexico all still had abortion services," Cohen said.

If the Roe decision is overturned, abortion will be restricted or eliminated in more states, people will be pushed to travel farther, and providers in the remaining states will be overwhelmed as people compete for open slots, he said.

"What happened over the past nine months with Texas is not sustainable when you have more and more states copying Texas or banning abortion altogether, like Oklahoma just did," Cohen said.

Oklahoma recently approved a law similar to Texas'

Abortion restrictions do not prevent abortions, according to a 2009 review from the Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Canada. The journal found a woman is just as likely to have an abortion whether the procedure is legally available or restricted in her region.

The review concludes that safe and legal abortions had declined globally, but unsafe, illegal abortion showed no sign of declining.

"Women are going to die," said Dr. Sealy Massingill, who travels between Planned Parenthood locations in Fort Worth and Waco. "Yeah, hopefully not that many, but it's going to happen, and we don't make people risk death for almost anything else."

Like many doctors, he said he is worried medical professionals will be targeted for providing treatment for things like miscarriages and ectopic pregnancies.

Massingill said he has been surprised by how busy Planned Parenthood has been since Senate Bill 8 became law. Before the law, an average week at the Waco clinic entailed between 50 and 60 medical abortions, which use medication to end a pregnancy, and 25 surgical abortions. That number has fallen to about 50 per week, he said.

Senate Bill 8 only allows for abortion before any cardiac activity from the fetal pole, a 1- to 2-millimeter embryo, is visible on an ultrasound, which means any time between about five and seven weeks.

"It's not a heartbeat," Massingill said. "It's what they wanted it to be, but that's not what you're seeing on the ultrasound. You're seeing motion in the fetal pole that will eventually be an organ."

Whether it will show up depends on factors like bladder fullness as much as development.

"The bill doesn't make any medical sense, because it wasn't written by physicians," he said.

Cohen said he is concerned that organizations and private citizens who transport or otherwise help someone obtain a legal abortion could face criminal charges in states where it becomes illegal.

"They're going to want to stop as many abortions as they can, so they are going to start targeting travel," Cohen said.

He said everyone who might need an abortion in the future should plan ahead. He said everyone should familiarize themselves with their state laws, make emergency plans ahead of time with people they trust and read up on self-managed, FDA-approved abortion pills at [plancpills.org](http://plancpills.org).

He also recommended learning about digital privacy and how to search abortion-related topics without leaving a trail.

"It's scary," Cohen said.

Massingill said self-managed abortion is relatively safe, but even with pills widely available, he is worried about illegitimate markets.

"If they just get sugar pills they won't be hurt too badly except losing money, but will they get something toxic?" he said. "It's going to be a wild west."

McGregor said the pregnancy center has been serving a different clientele since Senate Bill 8 went into effect: women dead-set on an abortion when they walk in the door who want to confirm they can still get one legally, and women who used contraception during sex, but want to make sure they definitely are not pregnant.

In May, 99 women who came to the center as "at risk for abortion" compared to 84 in the same month last year. Of those 99, 22 already had appointments and plans for abortions compared to 12 out of 84 the previous year.

McGregor said now, women come in for tests and an ultrasound before they have missed their first period.

"Typically we would have waited a few weeks to make sure we could see a heartbeat on the ultrasound," McGregor said. "Of course they're coming in not wanting to see a heartbeat on the ultrasound if they're actually pregnant and want an abortion."

She said most people in this category are nervous. A few are furious.

"You might get two or three, but you remember them," she said.

McGregor said ideally, pregnancy centers like hers would be as common as post offices, but that is not the reality. Most centers are staffed by volunteers and have limited hours.

"There needs to be more pregnancy centers and it needs to be yesterday," she said. "And of course there's going to need to be more state funding and all of that to help provide the services as well."

John Pisciotta, a former Baylor University economics professor turned anti-abortion activist, said he is not ready to count his chickens before they hatch, and the Supreme Court's decision will change very little for his organization, Pro-Life Waco.

"We are out proclaiming that abortion is a really bad thing, a really harmful thing, and how to think about it," Pisciotta said. "We're up on the overpass, we'll be at the corner of Valley Mills and Waco Drive. We protest at Bank of America."

He said his larger goal is to alter the country's culture, and he believes eliminating abortion would reduce promiscuous behavior.

"I've stated and I keep on stating it, pro-life culture cannot be built on the sexual revolution," he said. "And what has happened is that the morality espoused by Playboy is the dominant morality in our society, where sex is a recreational activity and pregnancy is some kind of error."