Why the Abortion Ruling Is Good News for HIV Health Efforts

The Supreme Court struck down a Louisiana law that would have shuttered most abortion clinics.

June 29, 2020 By Trent Straube

In a 5–4 ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a Louisiana law that would have effectively closed most of the clinics that provide abortions in the state, CNN reports. Though clearly a win for abortion rights, the decision is also welcome news for the LGBT and HIV communities.

That's because many abortion clinics provide basic health care services, such as testing for HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and they do so in a stigma-free environment.

"Clinics that provide abortion services are a critical lifeline for LGBTQ people. They are often the only health care providers who offer services free of judgment and stigma and provide care that is respectful and culturally competent," said Camilla B. Taylor, director of constitutional litigation for Lambda Legal, in that group's press release. Lambda Legal is an advocacy group that fights for LGBT and HIV issues. She continued: "In an environment where the right of LGBTQ people and women to access health care, including essential abortion services, is under attack, today's decision is welcome."

The ruling came down in the case June Medical Services v. Russo, which concerned a law requiring abortion service providers to have admitting privileges to nearby hospitals. When the Supreme Court heard arguments in March 2020, Lambda Legal joined other LGBT groups such as the Human Rights Campaign, the Transgender Law Center and Whitman-Walker Health, to file an amicus (friend-of-the-court) brief to support the abortion clinic.

You can read the entire brief here, but it states in part:

> An abortion clinic's closure most apparently impacts those seeking reproductive health care. Less well-known is the impact of such a closure on LGBTQ individuals seeking essential health care services. Members of the LGBTQ community have historically struggled to access basic health care because of stigma arising from social and political beliefs about sex, gender roles, and childbearing. This stigma has led the LGBTQ population to experience significant health disparities compared to other populations. For many LGBTQ individuals, reproductive health care clinics have stepped in to offer affirming environments in which to receive care. The LGBTQ community looks to abortion clinics to provide contraception and abortion services,

> and also wellness services, examinations, STI testing and treatment, hormone replacement therapy, and insemination services. These clinics provide these health care services in a safe, nurturing, and affirming environment—free from the discrimination and mistreatment often faced by LGBTQ individuals in the larger health care system.
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> Nationwide, abortion clinics that have developed expertise in offering stigmatized care serve LGBTQ patients with a range of services, including those offered by the clinics in Louisiana. For example…Cedar River Clinics in Washington provides family planning services, abortion care, and a dedicated LGBTQ health care program offering a range of wellness services (annual pelvic and breast exams, cancer screenings, HIV and STI testing, and safer sex education); services for transgender patients (hormone therapy, surgical referrals, postsurgical follow-up, and clerical services for gender marker changes); and insemination services for those seeking to conceive in furtherance of its mission to facilitate the full range of choices around family formation.

A POZ cover story from 2016 highlighted the intersection between HIV care and clinics that provide abortion. For more, read "Sexual Health Care for All: Planned Parenthood provides vital HIV services for both men and women."

In related news, Lambda Legal and other groups filed a lawsuit this month against a Trump administration rule allowing discrimination against LGBT people. For details, see "UPDATED: Lawsuit Filed Against Federal Health Care Rule Targeting LGBT Protections."

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