

Planned Parenthood's allies fight back

Reproductive rights advocates urge continued federal funding

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Long before Mike Pence assumed the role of vice president, before he served as Indiana governor, he set his sights on Planned Parenthood, proposing legislation in Congress that would defund the organization. Now, with Pence in the White House and a Republican controlled Congress, Planned Parenthood faithful are marshaling support to protect the 85- year-old organization. On Thursday, reproductive rights advocates gathered at the Statehouse to call on national politicians not to cut federal funds for Planned Parenthood. Sen. Karen Tallian, D Portage, recounted seeing a sign carried by a woman of about her age at a rally in Chicago. The sign read, "I can't believe we're still talking about this," Tallian said, adding in her own words, "I can't believe this. We won decades ago. I remember because I was there." Earlier this week, her Senate colleagues advanced a bill that would let parents have more of a say in a minor's decision over whether to have an abortion. And the House will take up a bill that would require abortion providers to give women information about a scientifically unproven method to "reverse" abortions that are induced with medications.

The local legislation, combined with murmurings from Washington, D.C., that Congress may try to defund Planned Parenthood, led the Health Access and Privacy Alliance to host Thursday's news conference, said Reba Boyd Wooden, president of the local coalition of organizations.

"It's really under attack in Indiana and nationally," she said.

Many detractors support defunding because some Planned Parenthood health centers provide abortions.

Abortion accounts for less than 3 percent of what Planned Parenthood does, Wooden said. When people are told about the scope of services the organization offers, 12 percent support defunding it, Wooden said.

Nationally, one in five women turns to Planned Parenthood for care at some point in her lifetime, Wooden said.

Indianapolis pediatrician Tracey Wilkinson said Planned Parenthood health centers often fill a gap in access to services. Many parents of her young patients receive gynecological care at Planned Parenthood health centers.

Without Planned Parenthood, many low-income patients might go without care, said Wilkinson, who appeared on behalf of Physicians for Reproductive Health, a national advocacy organization. People might skip potentially life-saving health screenings such as mammograms and Pap smears. The state's infant mortality rate, already among the nation's highest, could rise further.

“The idea that other providers could absorb Planned Parenthood patients has been resoundingly dismissed,” she said.



Megan Smith, left, of Boilermakers for Life addresses abortion opponents at Planned Parenthood in Lafayette on Feb. 11.

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