

June 24, 2022

Via email to: Waunita.Schwandtner@health.mo.gov;
BAC@health.mo.gov

Waunita Schwandtner
Chief, Bureau of Ambulatory Care
Department of Health & Senior Service
P.O. Box 570, 920 Wildwood
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0570

Dear Ms. Schwandtner:

For nearly 50 years, Reproductive Health Services of Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region (RHS) has proudly provided abortion services in the state of Missouri.¹ Our work in providing abortion care has empowered the lives of countless Missourians who have built the lives and families unique to them. That is what reproductive freedom affords people. Today, the freedom to control our own bodies, lives, and futures has ended for Missourians. We are writing this letter to notify your department that RHS is forced to cease abortion services in Missouri effective immediately. This letter is the end of a chapter that will be part of the shameful history of dismantling abortion access in the state of Missouri.

As you know, earlier today, a newly constituted U.S. Supreme Court upended 50 years of settled law, overruling *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973). And moments after the Supreme Court's action, Attorney General Eric Schmitt activated Missouri's so-called "trigger ban" by issuing an opinion to the Revisor of Statutes, notifying the Revisor that the U.S. Supreme Court had overruled *Roe*, and thereby putting into effect section 188.017, RSMo. That statute makes it unlawful to knowingly provide an abortion in the state of Missouri, except in cases of medical emergencies. *See* § 188.017.2, RSMo.

¹ Reproductive Health Services was formed in 1973, one month after *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973), was decided, and later became Reproductive Health Services of Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region in 1996.

Ms. Schwandtner

June 24, 2022

Page 2

While this is an end of an era, it is the beginning of a new frontier to build back access to basic health care because every person who lives in Missouri deserves to access all health care, including abortion, in the state in which they live. This should be a goal your department shares as the overseer of public health in this state. Regardless, our fight continues.

While we are deeply saddened we can no longer provide abortion care in Missouri, the reality is abortion has been virtually inaccessible in the state since 2019, when your Department embarked on a politically motivated crusade to shut us down. We challenged the Department, exposing its paternal “period-tracking” spreadsheet, stood up against your new mandate to force patients to undergo medically unnecessary vaginal examinations, and corrected your lies about the high-quality care we provide.

Our collective history has shown that the State’s obsession with abortion comes with high costs. As politicians and Department bureaucrats devote outsized attention to abortion, public health emergencies emerge and worsen.

For far too long, the State has willfully ignored the growing maternal mortality crisis that disproportionately afflicts Black communities. Black Missourians are **four** times more likely to die from pregnancy than white Missourians.² Missouri ranks an abysmal 44th in the nation for maternal mortality.³ Missouri also continues to lead the nation in rates of sexually transmitted infections. Banning abortion will only worsen these already dire public health outcomes.

We have longed for a Department that centers evidence and lives up to its mission statement — to be a “leader in promoting, protecting and partnering for health.” It is our hope that, with today’s decision, the State will refocus its efforts on protecting the health, safety, and security of all Missourians. Anything short is counter to pro-life proclamations.

And while we await that day, make no mistake: Our doors have not closed. We will continue providing high-quality sexual and reproductive health care at our seven health centers across Missouri. And we remain open to all abortion patients at our health center in Fairview Heights, Illinois, in the

² Mo. Dep’t Health & Senior Servs, Missouri Pregnancy-Associated Mortality Review: 2018 Annual Report 21 (June 2021), <https://health.mo.gov/data/pamr/pdf/annual-report.pdf>.

³ United Health Foundation, America’s Health Rankings https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/health-of-women-and-children/measure/maternal_mortality_a/state/MO?edition-year=2019.

Ms. Schwandtner

June 24, 2022

Page 3

Metro East. It is our commitment to serve any patient who comes through our doors. No. Matter. What.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Yamelsie Rodríguez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "Y" and "R".

Yamelsie Rodríguez
President & CEO