

Fauquier Times-Democrat

- Calendar
- Special Sections
- Print Ads
- Homesource
- Classifieds
- Employment

Partly cloudy 50°
5 Day Foreca:

home > fauquier > government

- Regional News
- Loudoun
- Fauquier
- Fairfax
- Clarke
- Rappahannock
- Prince William
- Classifieds
- Mark

- Fauquier News Home
- Top Stories
- Up Close
- Police/Courts
- Government
- Editorial/Opinion
- Education
- Sports
- Business
- Celebrations
- Obituaries
- Real Estate
- Weekender
- Contact Us



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House votes to tighten rules for abortion clinics

By Kara Glascoe, Capital News Service
02/03/2004

RICHMOND—Under legislation passed by the House last week, clinics that perform abortions would have to meet tougher licensing standards, which could force many of them to shut down.

The House voted 69-28 for the bill, which would require facilities performing 25 or more first-trimester abortions annually to meet regulations now in place for ambulatory surgery centers.

The legislation, sponsored by Del. Robert Marshall (R-Manassas), now goes to the Senate.

"There are no health or safety restrictions currently on these clinics," said Del. Allen Dudley (R-Rocky Mount). He voted for the measure.

The bill's critics say it would not enhance the safety of legal abortions. They say the legislation's real purpose is to restrict women's legal right to have an abortion.

Marshall's legislation would impose strict facility and staffing requirements on clinics or doctors' offices performing abortions. The rules would require clinics to have large operating rooms, emergency power generators—even a certain number of showers.

Of the 19 clinics in Virginia that perform abortions, only one could meet the proposed requirements, according to abortion rights supporters.

Grace Sparks, president of the Virginia League for Planned Parenthood, said the bill has "nothing" to do with the safety of first-trimester abortions. (After the first trimester, abortions must be performed at hospitals.)

The best way to increase the safety of abortion is to encourage women to have the procedure as early during pregnancy as possible, Sparks said.

She said the bill would force many clinics to close or to stop offering abortions, "making it impossible for women to obtain medical care locally. It will have the effect of forcing them to have abortions later and will have a negative effect on their health."

Dudley said Marshall's intention may be to reduce the number of abortions. Even so, he believes the bill imposes necessary restraints on the procedure.

"It makes sense to me that, if you're going to have some type of medical procedure like that that can lead to complications, certainly it at least should be done in a clean, healthy environment," Dudley said.

The Family Foundation of Virginia, a conservative activist group, applauded the House for passing Marshall's bill on Jan. 28.



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The foundation says that abortion is a dangerous procedure and that an Arlington woman died in connection with having an abortion. Such a case illustrates why the state should impose higher standards on facilities that perform abortions, the group says.

Marshall's bill is awaiting review by the Senate Committee on Education and Health.

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► **Name:** Haley Noyes

Date: Feb, 06 2004

This is ridiculous!! It is a womans right to have an abortion. It is her body, and she should have the right to do WHATEVER she wants with it. NOBODY should have the right to try and take that away from a woman.

Number of Opinions: 1

1 - 1 of 1

[Back to top](#) | [Email story](#) | [Post your opinion](#)

[Regional News](#) | [Loudoun](#) | [Fauquier](#) | [Fairfax](#) | [Clarke](#) | [Rappahannock](#) | [Prince William](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Marketplace](#)
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