

# Abortion: New regulations require structural changes

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The law states that the health centers will be required to maintain structural standards that include a five-foot width for public hallways, larger janitorial closets and a minimum of four parking spaces for each surgical room in the facility.

Opposition claims the regulations are a way to restrict women's access to abortion.

"I think there's no doubt that (the regulations) are politically motivated, and they clearly put politics above women's health," Stewart-Reid said.

Gans Turner, who has had an abortion, supports the actions of legislators.

"The Virginia Society of Human Life is very pleased with the (actions of the legislature) two years ago, making this proposal an effective law," said Gans Turner. "The fact that the General Assembly saw fit to provide

this protection for women... under the law, I think is a positive move."

There have been additional arguments that the structural regulations in particular are not medically necessary.

"I'm disappointed that the Board of Health... did not listen to the medical experts who've made it very clear that these regulations are not medically necessary and will not improve women's health care," Stewart-Reid said.

The chair of the Board of Health and representative for EMS, Bruce Edwards, thinks otherwise, due to his experience in EMS.

"I think that the whole purpose of this... is to ensure that the places are safe and they are clean," said Edwards. "From the standpoint of the structure, there needs to be adequate room in all these facilities so we can work on and take care of the patient."

According to Edwards, each of the 20 abortion clinics in Virginia were issued licenses with corrective notices for simple fixes like placement of hand wash basins and sanitation aspects, as well as for more complicated, structural issues.

While changes to health care facilities in accordance with these regulations will be made by summer 2014, only one facility has expressed that it will not be able to comply with new regulations.

Upon inspections by the state medical examiner, 12 of the 20 clinics are in the process of, or are already in compliance.

Virginia is not alone in creating these types of regulations. Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Arkansas, and Pennsylvania have adopted similar laws.

The recent death of a woman during an abortion procedure has provoked Maryland legislators to take action as well.

"This is a preventative and protective, reasonable action that is warranted. Unchecked abortion (clinics) sometimes become... unwilling to protect the women who walk into their doors," Gans Turner said.

Planned Parenthood representatives assure pro-choice advocates that the organization will not be shut down overall.

The Blacksburg location for Planned Parenthood and the Roanoke Health Center are not sure how these regulations will affect their business or facilities just yet.

The Virginia Department of Health held a public comment period for two months in which over 6,000 comments were submitted. Of these comments, over 4,000 were in opposition to the new regulations.

10 Virginia Senators, who originally voted in favor of the legislation in 2011, have

recently expressed disapproval of the finalized regulations.

In a statement from nine of those senators, they said "The Attorney General's office is incorrect in their interpretation... the (legislation) never required existing facilities to need new construction codes."

Twenty-eight public commenters also shared the opinion that existing facilities be grandfathered in, and that construction guidelines should only apply to new health care facilities.

The Board of Health included a grandfather clause in its original write-up of regulations, however, they were forced to remove it in September 2012 after the General Attorney's office deemed the clause was outside their realm of authority.

Medical professionals have also spoken out against the regulations.

"Such onerous and expen-

sive structural facility requirements are not rationally related to enhancing the safety of first-trimester abortion procedure, nor prevent potential complications," said Dr. Stephan Bendheim, chairman of the Department of OB/GYN at Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital, in a comment to the Board of Health.

Twenty-two Virginia delegates as well as the former chair of the Virginia State Board of Health, Fred Hannett, spoke in opposition to the regulations as well.

"Though the regulations have already been passed, pro-choice groups won't give up the fight.

"We will continue to organize our supporters to speak out against these regulations and to hopefully get them overturned," Stewart-Reid said.

Follow the writer on Twitter:  
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## Camels come to campus

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The Hokie Bird enjoys an afternoon ride on a camel in front of the Graduate Life Center. The event was sponsored by Friends of Israel as a celebration of Israel's 65th anniversary.

photo by  
Ben Weidlich

## Mural: Art reflects nature

"That deer (featured in the mural) showed up in my garden the week I was asked to join," Bento said. "It showed up at the same time, two days in a row."

The background of the mural came more naturally.

"The mountains (behind the deer) are how I see everything here, every street here... everything is so curvy," Bento said.

Bento says she hopes to be able to design more murals for the town in the future, and hopes that after this unveiling, the younger community of local student artists would become interested in contributing to more murals.

She said the incoming wave of undergraduate artists would hopefully get involved through the Blacksburg Regional Art Association (BRAA), Blacksburg's volunteer-based group of artistic and creative residents.

The project was started around December 2012 as a joint partnership between

the Montgomery Regional Tourism Office, the Town of Blacksburg, the Blacksburg Partnership, 16 Blocks magazine, the BRAA and Blue Ridge Real Estate LLC.

Bento says she got involved when 16 Blocks magazine posted they were looking for an artist to take the project on, and when she showed interest, they were excited to take her on as the designer.

The LOVEworks social media campaign, run by the VTC, was started to share the message that "love is at the heart of every Virginia vacation." They encourage visitors and residents to take a picture with the mural and share it through social media.

Another LOVEworks site opened in Christiansburg earlier this month, and the cost of creating both sites will be reimbursed for up to \$1,200 by the state tourism office.

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