

Greenstein responds to request for abortion files

by mark ballard

Capitol news bureau

January 22, 2012

[0 Comments](#)

On the eve of a massive march against abortion through downtown Baton Rouge streets, the state health chief promised Friday to enforce a legal requirement that physicians who perform pregnancy terminations properly fill out the mandatory forms.

On Saturday morning, about 30 buses are expected to deliver people from across Louisiana to march down North 4th Street from Galvez Plaza near the Old State Capitol to the steps of the new State Capitol, said Benjamin Clapper, the executive director of Louisiana Right to Life Federation, a Metairie-based organization that lobbies for legislation that would restrict abortions.

The rally, which is cosponsored by several church-related groups, is to remember 39th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court decision in Roe versus Wade, which anti-abortion advocates say legalized abortions.

U.S. Sen. David Vitter, R-La., and Pastor Fred Luter of the Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, who also is First Vice President of the Southern Baptist Convention, are scheduled to speak, Clapper said. State Sen. Sharon Weston Broome, R-Baton Rouge, and Gene Mills, president of Louisiana Family Forum, also are scheduled to address the group.

Gov. Bobby Jindal is in Miami at a family gathering and won't return to Baton Rouge until Sunday, according to Frank Collins, his press secretary.

State Department of Health and Hospitals Secretary Bruce Greenstein on Friday met with representatives of 20 anti-abortion advocates who had filed public records requests seeking disclosure of about three decades worth of Reports of Induced Termination of Pregnancy.

Physicians are required by law to fill out a form for each procedure they perform. The reports are supposed to document 25 specific pieces of information about the woman and her pregnancy, how the procedure went and any complications.

Mike Johnson, a Shreveport lawyer, said the advocates he is helping suspect that many physicians over many years filled out the forms in advance and did not accurately portray what happened before, during and after the abortion. The state had either not noticed or ignored the improperly filed forms that are supposed to provide statistics used to set health-care policies, he said.

The goal of the public records requests was to press the Jindal administration to enforce the state law that levies penalties on physicians who fail to properly complete the forms, Johnson said.

The assurances the group received from Greenstein on Friday answered those concerns, he said. "From my perspective, we seem to be entering a new phase of enforcement," Johnson said in an interview after the meeting.

Richard Mahoney, one of the anti-abortion advocates filing a public records request, said that Greenstein assured him that state government's history of failing to oversee and detect improperly filed forms was over.

"The concern here is that for decades there has not been recording of complications," Greenstein said. "If we have doctors doing surgical procedures who are falsifying records that must stop."

Greenstein said DHH instituted new procedures in August 2011 that require the forms to be filed electronically and to ensure no fields can be left empty.

He said he also agreed to find the form of a Baton Rouge woman who claims that complications caused by her abortion led to a hysterectomy. Greenstein, Mahoney and Johnson refused to identify the woman, who attended the meeting and provided the secretary with medical records.

Though numbered, the forms are not directly linked to specific patients, Greenstein said.

But using dates and other attributes, DHH staffers should be able to find the form the physician filled out on the woman's procedure. If the form does not include information about the complications, Greenstein said he would turn the matter over the District Attorney's Office in Baton Rouge for further investigation and possible prosecution.

2) <http://theadvocate.com/news/1830253-123/anti-abortion-activists-march.html>