

Planned Parenthood ask Whitmer for tax dollars

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Planned Parenthood asks Whitmer for \$5M to bridge funding gap

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Lansing — Planned Parenthood of Michigan is asking Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer to use her executive authority to provide a one-time \$5 million allocation to its health centers amid a federal funding crunch.

Because of an influx of changes to Medicaid and Title X dollars, the abortion provider is "facing a critical funding gap that we cannot bridge alone," Planned Parenthood said in an open letter set to be delivered Wednesday to the governor, a longtime political ally in the reproductive rights movement.

The funding gap could result in the closure of women's health clinics, causing an "irreversible loss of reproductive health infrastructure," said Paula Thornton Greear, president and CEO for Planned Parenthood of Michigan and Planned Parenthood Advocates of Michigan

"We have raised concerns about this trajectory for months," Greear said. "We need you to take immediate action to keep our doors open because the window to preserve access to reproductive health care in Michigan, including abortion, is rapidly closing."

In a statement Wednesday, Whitmer's office called the governor "one of the country's greatest champions for reproductive freedom" but declined to take unilateral action on the request.

"Under the Michigan Constitution, the Legislature has the responsibility to allocate state funds," said Stacey LaRouche, a spokeswoman for the governor. "We would encourage any organization or individual to work with the Legislature on their budget asks."

Right to Life of Michigan called the prospect of a state bailout for Planned Parenthood a "shocking misuse of taxpayer dollars." The implication that Michigan, which enshrined the right to abortion in the state constitution in

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2022, has a lack of access to abortion care is "ridiculous," said Amber Roseboom, president of Right to Life of Michigan.

"Planned Parenthood is a major donor to Democrat candidates, and to funnel millions of dollars to them at this time is shameful," Roseboom said in a statement Wednesday. "Any financial issues Planned Parenthood claims to have are due to wild mismanagement and the prioritization of politics."

Democratic state Reps. Laurie Pohutsky of Livonia and Carrie Rheingans of Ann Arbor told reporters later Wednesday that they supported Planned Parenthood's request.

"You can't say that you're going to 'fight like hell' and then not do the bare minimum when they're in need," said Pohutksy, referencing a phrase Whitmer used while campaigning on the issue of abortion in 2022.

"There's some money that can be moved around," Rheingans said. "... Put your money where your mouth is literally."

The Planned Parenthood letter argues that the situation is the fault of the Trump administration, his conservative allies in Congress and "anti-abortion judges." Greear pointed to federal changes excluding Planned Parenthood from Medicaid coverage and cutting the group's Title X funding as some of the main factors affecting its budget.

Any legislative effort to appropriate funding is complicated — and made all but impossible — by the fact that the Republican-led House, which "is loyal to the president and his politics," would be unlikely to cooperate with such a request, Planned Parenthood's letter to Whitmer said.

But Greear maintained Wednesday that the governor has authority as the state's chief executive to release the needed state tax dollars.

"We're asking for the governor to use whatever lawful, administrative, budgetary or executive pathways that are available to stabilize reproductive health care access in Michigan before closures occur," Greear told The Detroit News.

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It was unclear whether existing funding in the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services budget could be used to give Planned Parenthood a direct grant to keep clinics open.

"The specific mechanism matters less than the outcome at this point," Greear said. "The operational timeline is driving urgency and there are pathways, which the governor can act upon, whether that's through MDHHS or another state agency."

In her letter, Greear noted other governors have taken executive action to bridge funding gaps in their states, including Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, who announced in January a public-private partnership to support funding for reproductive health groups.

Planned Parenthood of Michigan currently has 10 physical health centers and one virtual clinic in Michigan. All 11 centers provide medication abortion and four also provide procedural abortion.

Last year, Planned Parenthood of Michigan closed health centers in Jackson, Petoskey and Marquette and consolidated two in Ann Arbor.

The issue causing the funding crunch stems largely from a growing need for federally-funded Title X program dollars, which cover individuals who can't afford insurance or don't qualify for Medicaid, Greear said in the letter.

In recent months, patients have had to rely more and more on Title X dollars because they've been unable to use Medicaid to cover Planned Parenthood care, have lost private insurance or cannot afford the premiums on Affordable Care Act plans, Greear wrote.

The group's annual funding cap for Title X dollars, which usually runs from October to October, was fully exhausted in April, Greear said. It is not just abortion access that would be compromised by the lack of funding, the group said, but also those seeking contraceptives, STI testing or cancer screenings.

"We had more patients qualifying for subsidized care and fewer federal dollars to support that care," she said.

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Greear cited the governor's past support of abortion policies, including the enshrinement of reproductive health rights in the state constitution in 2022, in urging her support.

"Gov. Whitmer has one of the strongest records on reproductive freedom in the country," Greear said. "And I keep going back to that and the issue being that constitutional protections are in name only if they are not matched by operational infrastructure."

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