

Abortions in Illinois reach 10-year high in 2008

January 3, 2010

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The number of abortions performed in Illinois reached a 10-year high in 2008, newly compiled state records show.

The uptick could be due to the state's flagging economy and to the first full year of operation of a new clinic offering abortion services in Aurora, abortion-rights advocates and opponents alike say.

In 2008, 47,717 abortions were performed statewide according to the Illinois Public Health Department.
(AP file)

In 2008, the most recent year for which data are available, figures from the Illinois Public Health Department show that 47,717 abortions were performed statewide.

That represents a 5 percent increase from 2007. And it's the most abortions in Illinois in a year since 1998, when 49,403 women were reported to have had abortions.

The state's main provider of abortion services has heard from its clients that the economy is a factor in their decisions, said Steve Trombley, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood Council's Chicago area chapter.

"When couples are facing an unintended pregnancy and have to make a decision whether they want to carry pregnancy to term and have another child, they'll factor economic circumstance into the decision," Trombley said. "If one or both parents is unemployed, it's less likely couples are going to want to expand their family size."

Planned Parenthood declined to provide data on abortions provided in 2008 at its clinics in Chicago, Aurora and Champaign.

Robert Gilligan, executive director of the anti-abortion Catholic Conference of Illinois, attributed the 2008 increases, in part, to the opening of Planned Parenthood's Aurora clinic in November 2007.

"I think that has something to do with it," Gilligan said.

Abortion statistics in three of the four counties straddling Aurora saw the number of women seeking the procedure jump dramatically in 2008, state records show.

There was a 73 percent jump in abortions for women in Kendall County, the home of 194 women who had an abortion in 2008. A year earlier, 112 women in Kendall County had an abortion.

In Kane County, the number of women who obtained abortions in 2008 rose 38 percent, increasing to 1,145 from 832 in 2007.

And in Will County, the number of women who obtained abortions grew by 22 percent. In 2008, 1,161 Will County women got abortions, compared with 953 in 2007.

Increases in those three counties alone accounted for 25 percent of the overall increase in abortions statewide in 2008, state records show.

The number of Cook County women obtaining abortions also jumped in 2008. State records show 25,529 of the procedures were performed on women from Cook last year, compared with 22,296 in 2007, a 15 percent increase.

Gilligan said he thinks other factors also are driving the statewide increase, starting with a lack of "common-sense laws" restricting abortion. He cites the long-stalled parental notification law that is tied up in litigation despite having passed the Illinois General Assembly in 1995.

His group and others have pushed for changes in law to require women to witness ultrasound images of their fetuses before abortion and to impose mandatory waiting periods, but those approaches have not gained legislative traction.

"We refuse to do any of those things, which helps to drive the numbers up, and secondly, we've increased access," Gilligan said, explaining his theory behind the 2008 increases.

On a percentage basis, the age group with the largest increase in abortions from 2007 to 2008 was those 14 and under. In 2008, 299 girls in that group obtained abortions, up 16 percent from 2007, state records show.

The group with the next-largest percentage increase was women 20 to 24 years old. Abortions for that group reached 13,130 in 2008, up 11 percent from the year before.

Data for abortions performed in 2009 are not expected to be released by the state until next fall.