

# Illinois Billboard Takes Jab at Missouri's Restrictive Abortion Laws

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GRANITE CITY – Commuters from Missouri to Illinois are seeing a new billboard taking a jab at Missouri's restrictive abortion laws.

The billboard, located at the interchange of eastbound I-55 where it merges to eastbound I-64, says, “Welcome to Illinois, where you can get a safe, legal abortion.” It is sponsored by the Hope Clinic in Granite City, which is the only abortion provider in Illinois south of Springfield. It is based on a similar billboard located at the Colorado-Utah border sponsored by Progress Now Colorado. When Hope Clinic Outreach and

Communication Manager Alison Dreith saw the billboard they had on social media, she reached out to them with the hopes of doing the same thing in Illinois.

“They were so excited for us to take the idea,” she said. “We've had lots of positive shares on social media. It's been real exciting to see so much support. We haven't seen a lot of negative responses, which is rare on social media. We always have at least one negative response, or one anti-abortion person on there. I'm sure it's out there somewhere, but I haven't seen it.”

Dreith said her clinic sees an influx of people from across the Midwest. Illinois is known as a place to get a safe and legal abortion throughout the Midwest and the South, where abortion laws are becoming ever-more restrictive.

“Missouri and Mississippi go back and forth between who has the most restrictive abortion laws in the country,” Dreith said. “We have people come from all over Illinois, Missouri, Indiana, Kentucky, and even farther to get abortions here.”

While Hope Clinic is the only place in Illinois south of Springfield providing abortions, several states only have one clinic in the entirety of the state. Missouri, for example, has one clinic. It is in St. Louis. Anyone wanting an abortion in Missouri must travel to St. Louis to do so legally. There is also a 72-hour waiting period after a woman requests an abortion. She is sent home with legally-mandated literature and has to return to St. Louis after 72 hours.

To Dreith, this practice is indicative of oppressive policies unfairly burdening women from rural areas as well as women experiencing poverty. For them to come from all corners of Missouri to St. Louis only to be forced to stay three days or go home and return after three days is extremely cost-prohibitive.

Kentucky is another state with only one clinic. Dreith said fellow bordering state, Indiana, is also prohibitive with abortions, but not nearly at the same level as Missouri.

“Indiana is pretty restrictive, but not as restrictive as Missouri,” she said. “Vice President Mike Pence signed a lot of laws there during his time of governor, and at least one of them made it to the Supreme Court. There is a real race to be the first state to ban *Roe v. Wade*. Republicans see a future without *Roe v. Wade*.”

*Roe v. Wade* was the monumental Supreme Court ruling allowing abortion in 1974. Since then, those who oppose the practice have been working diligently to repeal it. Dreith said the current Trump administration has made restrictive abortion laws easier to pass with two Conservative appointments to the Supreme Court.

Several states across the country now have six-week policies, meaning they still adhere to federal law by allowing women to seek abortions, but will only do so before six weeks.

“Most patients don't know they're pregnant until after six weeks has passed,” Dreith said.

Because of this, women with pregnancies beyond that marker often seek abortion services at Hope Clinic, which has a 24-week limit. Even with that policy and Illinois's current position as an island of liberal abortion laws in a sea of restrictions, Dreith believes that state should be even more permissive with abortion laws.

“Illinois is viewed as a safer space, but it's not as safe as it can be,” she said. “There are bills in the General Assembly that could solidify access to abortions in the future.”

Among those bills is a ban on parental notification by minors to get abortions, a practice Dreith believes puts young people at risk as it currently stands. She also supports House Bill (HB) 2495 – the Reproductive Health Act – which would codify *Roe v. Wade* and allow Illinois to continue to provide abortions even if the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. New York recently passed a similar law.

In the future, however, Dreith said many women may be able to seek safe abortion care from the comfort of their own homes outside of clinics, waiting periods and legally-mandated brochures.

“The world in 2019 is a lot different than it was pre-1974,” she said. “There are a lot more options now.”

Dreith said medication often given to women to cause an abortion are sometimes able to be attained online, giving women access to manageable abortions at home. This medication is often what is provided at any such abortion clinic the woman would visit to seek such services.

Father Paul Nguyen of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Alton said he believed Missouri's laws cut the amount of abortions done in the state, but agreed with Dreith many people were coming to Illinois in order to get them done. He said the Hope Clinic would, therefore, be willing to market their services more toward people coming from Missouri who may not be able to conform to Missouri's abortion laws. Unlike Dreith, however, he believes restricting access to abortions is a good thing.

“What is distressing as a Catholic and a priest is the radical denial that abortion is the immoral taking of a human life,” he said. “Abortions are now permitted later and later in gestation – during weeks in which the fetus looks more and more like a normal baby people would hold and take care of – obviously, people are going against that instinct.”

Fr. Nguyen believes the permissive abortion laws of Illinois are part of a larger issue of society quelling its “voice of conscience.” He said abortions are often sought as a matter of convenience or emotional desires. He said it was indicative of a larger problem of promiscuity as well as a “culture of gratification.”

“Sexual desire is often sought without its purpose, which is to bring a beautiful new life into this world,” he said. “People want to have the fun without taking the responsibility. Abortion then is used by some people as a form of birth control. Sexual promiscuity leads to so many other issues in society as well. It can be linked to violence – like domestic violence – and drug use. It's part of our culture of quieting our conscience.”

A coalition of six Catholic bishops in Illinois released a statement at the end of March decrying Illinois's abortion laws.

“The state and its leaders have not only a responsibility, but also a vested interest in defending the sacredness and value of every human life,” Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago said in a release on the Illinois Catholic website. “Wherever we turn today, we encounter mounting efforts to treat the lives of men, women and children as mere means to larger and allegedly more important goals.”

Fr. Nguyen also recommended viewing a documentary called “Unplanned” in which a former Planned Parenthood director leaves her position and tells her story. He suggested pregnant women not wanting to abort their unplanned pregnancy contact anti-abortion women's health centers like Thrive in Alton or Beacon of Light in Maryville. He also suggested contacting a hot-line such as 1(800) 712-4357, which is operated by “Pro-Life.”