

STATE & LOCAL

Restricted Wake County Abortion Coverage

Anna Turner, Staff Writer

Many Wake County citizens are up in arms at the county's ruling to no longer cover elective abortions. According to the News and Observer, the decision was made after county officials discovered a "29-year-old state Supreme Court ruling which they say makes reimbursement for the practice illegal." Self-insurance plans will still cover abortions in instances of rape, incest, or endangerment of the life of the mother, but elective abortions are no longer included under that umbrella. Since 1999, the state has included elective abortions in its employee's healthcare plans. After reevaluating a 1981 court case, it is now seen as a risk for Wake County to pay for its employees' elective abortions, on the grounds that it is illegal for tax payers to be paying for that type of service. The News and Observer also notes that other counties which cover elective abortions in employee healthcare plans could potentially face lawsuits over the issue.

As reported by The News and Observer, Rep. Paul Stams, an Apex Republican House minority

leader and "a dogged opponent of abortion," recently succeeded in removing elective abortions from employee healthcare plans in the town of Apex. There have been many fingers pointed at Stams for his aggressive removal of elective abortion coverage. The News and Observer quoted Melissa Reed, vice president of public policy for Planned Parenthood of North Carolina, as she argued that certain coverage "shouldn't be taken away because of somebody's political agenda."

This new policy was ultimately brought about after a 1981 court case was revisited. Regarding the 1981 case, court justices stated, "By no stretch of the imagination can we consider medically unnecessary abortions as 'essential to the health and welfare' of the recipients." County Attorney Scott Warren assured N&O reporters that Wake County officials did not base their actions upon moral issues.

There are many people against this change in healthcare coverage, both by Planned Parenthood of North Carolina and by the



Wake County Courthouse, photo courtesy of godowntownraleigh.com

American Civil Liberties Union. They argue against the ruling, saying that "North Carolina statutes give broad authority to both cities and counties to provide whatever health insurance and other benefits the city council or county commissioners deem appropriate." As reported in the News and Observer, there is a very heated debate over whether or not county administrators should be able to revoke an aspect of health coverage that was once previously approved. The N&O also notes that Democratic commissioners Lindy Brown and Stan Norwalk said they had each received more than 500 e-mails from citizens who are opposed to the elective abortion ban.

Many pro-life and pro-choice advocates attended the Wake County Board of Commissioners hearing. Dorothy Yéuung, an official of North Carolina Right to Life, expressed her support of the ban, while holding her infant in her arms. In opposition of the ban, Sandy Babb, a board member of NARAL (National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League), was quoted in saying that this ban is a "slap in the face of every female employee of Wake County."

Wake County officials continue to say that they will stand by the ruling as it is based on legality and not questions of morality.

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