

Late-term abortion plan dropped in Wisconsin, but questions remain

MADISON, Wis. – Despite news that the plans were dropped for the Madison Surgery Center to begin offering late-term abortions, questions remain after a statement from UW Health May 5 said the organization is still committed to including late-term abortions among its reproductive health services.

Pro-life groups, however, have seen this development as positive. They hope the decision not to perform abortions at the Madison Surgery Center indicates that the second-trimester abortion services would not be offered in Madison.

“The leadership of the Madison Surgery Center is to be commended, if reports from the state of Wisconsin and local media outlets are true,” the Diocese of Madison wrote in a news release May 6. “Whether the decision to forgo destroying innocent lives, through late-term abortions, was made by examining their own consciences, whether it is because people of good will in the community (including MSC staff members) persistently and peacefully voiced their objections, or whether it is a product of prayer, this is the right decision.”

In February 2009, the surgery center’s board voted unanimously to approve a plan to begin second-trimester abortions at the location on South Park Street in Madison. Madison Surgery Center is a joint partnership of University of Wisconsin Medical Foundation, University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics and Meriter Hospital.

The plan drew national attention and protests, including a persistent presence outside the site, a 40 Days for Life vigil and a Stations of the Cross prayer gathering over the next year.

On May 5, Pro-Life Wisconsin released a letter from the office of the attorney general of Wisconsin indicating that the plans had been dropped. According to the letter, written by Assistant Attorney General Kevin Potter to an attorney from Eau Claire, “it is my understanding based on recent information from the UW that they have now abandoned plans to provide late-term abortion services at MSC.”

Madison Vigil for Life co-director Steve Karlen described the moment of hearing the news May 5 as one of “total elation.”

“We had an inkling this would be the case,” Karlen said, “but the fact that we now have a definite statement for it is a great victory for Catholics, Christians and all pro-lifers out there.”

However, a statement released later in the day by UW Health renewed suspicions that the organization had not entirely abandoned the plans to include second-trimester abortion in their range of services.

“There are reports in today’s media that UW Health has abandoned its plans to provide second-trimester pregnancy terminations. This is not true,” the statement said. “UW Health remains strongly committed to a comprehensive women’s reproductive health service that includes this important procedure.

“All of our clinical programs are designed and implemented to best serve the needs of our patients,” the statement continued. “Because of the sensitive nature of this clinical program, we do not consider it in the best interests of our patients to discuss the timing or location of these services. We remain steadfast in our commitment to ensure that area women have access to a comprehensive women’s health program.”

But pro-life groups continue to thank all who were instrumental in delaying and defeating the plan at the Madison Surgery Center.

“All of the regular ‘meat-and-potatoes’ Catholics and pro-lifers in general, who faithfully and sacrificially helped in this effort, through prayer or street activism, can be very satisfied that Our Lord took their ‘loaves and fishes’ and brought about a successful result,” said Patrick Delaney, respect life coordinator for the Diocese of Madison.

Barbara Lyons, executive director of Wisconsin Right to Life, said her organization and other pro-life citizens and groups “are now alert and looking for the next move by UW officials.”

“The abandonment of the Madison Surgery Center is one gigantic step forward but not the final one, and we will be there every step of the way,” she added.