
SENATE COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

Senator Bob Archuleta, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No:	AB 2531	Hearing Date:	6/22/26
Author:	Irwin		
Version:	3/16/26		
Urgency:	No	Fiscal:	Yes
Consultant:	Diego Nelson		

Subject: Public health: abortion services

DESCRIPTION

Summary:

AB 2531 expands the California Reproductive Health Equity Program to provide no-cost or reduced-cost abortion and contraception services to eligible veterans who cannot access those services through their health coverage, the VA health system, Medi-Cal, or Family PACT. The bill also requires CalVet to post a link to abortion.ca.gov on its women veterans resources webpage.

Existing law:

1. Establishes the California Reproductive Health Equity Program within the Department of Health Care Access and Information to ensure abortion and contraception are affordable and accessible to all patients, regardless of ability to pay, and to provide financial support to safety net providers for uncompensated care provided to low-income patients who would otherwise lack access to care. (Health and Safety Code § 127632.)
2. Allows a Medi-Cal enrolled provider to apply for a grant, and a continuation award after the initial grant, if the provider agrees to provide abortion and contraception services within the provider's scope of practice and licensure. (Health and Safety Code § 127633.)
3. Requires services under the program to be provided at no cost or reduced cost to individuals with household income at or below 400% of the federal poverty level who are uninsured or whose health coverage does not include both abortion and contraception, and who are not otherwise eligible to receive both abortion and contraception care at no cost through Medi-Cal and Family PACT. (Health and Safety Code §§ 127633 and 127634.)
4. Establishes the Department of Health Care Services to administer the Medi-Cal program, which provides comprehensive medical coverage to low-income individuals, and the Family PACT program, which provides comprehensive clinical family planning services and sexually transmitted disease screening and treatment to low-income individuals. (Welfare and Institutions Code §§ 14000 et seq. and 14132(aa).)
5. Establishes the Reproductive Privacy Act, which prohibits the state from denying or interfering with an individual's right to choose or obtain an abortion prior to viability of the fetus, or when necessary to protect the life or health of the pregnant person. (Cal. Const., art. I, § 1.1; Health and Safety Code §§ 123462 and 123466.)
6. Requires health plans and health insurers, except specified specialized plans or policies, to provide coverage for specified contraceptive services and methods. (Health and Safety Code § 1367.25; Insurance Code § 10123.196.)

7. Establishes the Department of Veterans Affairs and requires the department to perform specified duties related to veterans in the state, including providing information related to health care programs and services. (Military and Veterans Code §§ 63, 70, and 90.)
8. Requires the California Health and Human Services Agency, or an entity designated by the agency, to establish an internet website where the public can find information on abortion services in the state. (Health and Safety Code § 123430.)

This bill:

1. Adds eligible veterans to the population served by the California Reproductive Health Equity Program.
2. Requires participating providers, to the extent services are covered under Medi-Cal, to provide abortion and contraception services at no cost or reduced cost to a veteran who meets both of the following criteria:
 - Has health coverage that does not include abortion, or is unable to access abortion or contraception care through the Department of Veterans Affairs health system; and,
 - Is not otherwise eligible to receive both abortion and contraception care at no cost through Medi-Cal and Family PACT.
3. Provides that a patient's self-declaration of income, source of health coverage, or veteran status at the time of service is sufficient to determine whether the patient may qualify for no-cost or reduced-cost services under the program.
4. Specifies that the bill does not require a provider to accept additional patients if, in the reasonable professional judgment of the provider, accepting additional patients would endanger access to, or continuity of, care for existing patients.
5. Requires grant applications to include the cost of uncompensated abortion and contraception services provided to patients with household incomes at or below 400% of the federal poverty level and to patients who are veterans during the previous 12 months, as well as the anticipated cost of those services during the upcoming 12 months.
6. Defines "veteran" to mean a person who served in the active military, naval, air, or space service of the United States, or as a member of the National Guard who was called to and released from active duty or active service for at least 90 consecutive days, and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable, was discharged due to a service-connected disability within that 90-day period, or was discharged solely as a result of Executive Order No. 14183 issued on January 27, 2025.
7. Requires the California Department of Veterans Affairs to publish a link to abortion.ca.gov on the women veterans resources page of its website.
8. Makes technical and conforming changes.

BACKGROUND

California law protects access to abortion and contraception. The California Constitution and the Health and Safety Code guarantee the right to abortion and contraception, and California's health coverage laws generally require abortion and maternity services to be treated neutrally. Medi-Cal covers abortion services as a physician service without cost sharing for enrollees.

The California Reproductive Health Equity Program was created through the California Abortion and Reproductive Equity Act in 2022 to ensure that abortion and contraception services remain affordable and accessible for patients who lack coverage or the ability to pay. The program provides grants to safety net providers to offset the cost of uncompensated abortion and

contraception care. Under current law, the program focuses on patients with household incomes at or below 400% of the federal poverty level who are uninsured or whose coverage does not include both abortion and contraception, and who cannot already receive those services at no cost through Medi-Cal and Family PACT.

Recent federal actions have affected both military service policies and veterans' access to reproductive health care. Executive Order No. 14183, issued on January 27, 2025, titled "Prioritizing Military Excellence and Readiness," revoked prior federal policy allowing all qualified Americans to serve in the Armed Forces regardless of gender identity and directed the Department of Defense to revise related medical, accession, and retention standards, as well as policies concerning pronoun usage and access to sex-specific facilities. Separately, federal VA reproductive health policy has also changed. In 2022, the Department of Veterans Affairs adopted a rule allowing abortion counseling and abortions at VA health care centers for pregnant veterans and CHAMPVA beneficiaries when the patient's life or health was threatened or in cases of rape or incest. In December 2025, the VA reversed that policy by excluding abortion and abortion counseling from the VA medical benefits package and CHAMPVA coverage, except when a physician certifies that carrying the pregnancy to term would endanger the life of the mother. As a result, federal military and veterans policies may affect Californians who serve or have served in the Armed Forces, even where state law protects abortion access.

California is home to approximately 150,000 women veterans, representing nearly 11% of the state's veteran population. Approximately one-third of California's women veterans are of reproductive age, and women veterans are the fastest-growing segment of the veteran community. Because many veterans rely on federal VA health care or CHAMPVA coverage, changes to federal VA reproductive health policy can directly affect whether those veterans can access abortion or contraception care through their existing health coverage.

COMMENT

According to the author: "California voters established a constitutional right to abortion, and our veterans deserve full access to essential health care through their VA benefits, including abortion. However, a recent rule implemented by the Trump administration has imposed upon the entire VA system one of the most severe abortion bans in the country, and California's VA providers are beholden to this federal ban despite California's state constitutional protections.

To address this issue, AB 2531 would expand access to the Uncompensated Care grant program for veterans whose health care coverage does not include abortion. By expanding this eligibility, California ensures that the people who have served our country are not left without healthcare due to the backwards and inequitable policies of the Trump Administration. AB 2531 also ensures that the California Department of Veterans Affairs posts to the link to Abortion.ca.gov on their women veterans resources webpage, so that our women veterans know this critical resource will be available to them."

Veterans who depend on the VA health system or other limited coverage may face practical barriers to abortion and contraception care, even when those services are lawful and protected under California law. AB 2531 responds by allowing eligible veterans to receive no-cost or reduced-cost care through the state's existing Uncompensated Care grant program when the care is not available through the VA or their health coverage. The bill also includes within its

definition of “veteran” a person discharged solely as a result of Executive Order No. 14183, issued on January 27, 2025.

Rather than creating a new standalone program, this bill builds on the California Reproductive Health Equity Program, which already supports Medi-Cal enrolled providers that deliver abortion and contraception care to patients who lack coverage or cannot otherwise pay. This bill adds eligible veterans to that framework and requires grant applications to account for uncompensated care provided to veterans.

The bill allows a patient’s self-declaration of income, health coverage, or veteran status to be sufficient at the time of service. This standard is intended to avoid front-end documentation requirements that could delay access to time-sensitive reproductive health care. This bill also preserves provider discretion by making clear that a provider is not required to accept additional patients if doing so would endanger access to, or continuity of, care for existing patients. AB 2531 additionally requires CalVet to link to abortion.ca.gov on its women veterans resources webpage, giving veterans a direct path to state information about abortion services through a veterans-focused resource.

Prior Legislation

AB 2134 (Weber), Chapter 562, Statutes of 2022, established the California Abortion and Reproductive Equity Act and the California Reproductive Health Equity Program within HCAI. SB 1301 (Kuehl), Chapter 385, Statutes of 2002, enacted the Reproductive Privacy Act, which provides that every individual has a fundamental right of privacy with respect to reproductive decisions, including the right to choose or refuse birth control and the right to choose to bear a child or obtain an abortion.

Arguments in support:

According to Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California: “In 2022, California voters overwhelmingly approved Proposition 1 to enshrine the right to reproductive freedom in our State’s Constitution. However, access to abortion care remains out of reach and, in fact, has become more restrictive for California’s veterans that rely on the federally-regulated VA system for care. In December 2025, the Trump administration implemented a new policy that effectively bans veterans from being able to get abortion care through VA health system, even in cases of rape or incest. The policy goes farther, by also banning VA providers from counseling veterans and their families about abortion. Despite California’s constitutional protections, our state’s veterans and VA providers are beholden to this federal abortion ban. Today, these veterans can only access abortion care through another provider outside of their health care coverage necessitating out-of-pocket costs. AB 2531 would address this injustice in California by narrowly expanding eligibility in the existing Uncompensated Care Grant Program to include veterans who are seeking abortion care but don’t have coverage to pay for it. This Program was created in 2022 following the Dobbs decision for this exact reason – to help ensure that one’s ability to pay is not a barrier to accessing abortion or contraceptive care. Women are the fastest growing group of veterans. Through this bill, California is stepping up to show those who have served our country that they are not left without health care due to the backwards and inequitable policies of the Trump administration. It is for these reasons that PPAC is proud to sponsor AB 2531 (Irwin) and asks for your AYE vote.”

Arguments in opposition:

According to California Catholic Conference: “We are always opposed to the violence of abortion. However, reducing the healthcare needs of women veterans to abortion at the expense

of every other kind of reproductive healthcare will only worsen gender biases and the outcomes for women's and maternal health. Comprehensive reproductive and sexual health understands the totality of the person, including the physiological, nutritional, endocrine, cardiovascular, and psychological needs of women across the lifespan. Use these funds to address the healthcare shortage by incentivizing solutions to OBGYN training, lowering c-section rates, maternal mortality, increasing prenatal care options, or addressing social determinants of health. Abortion is already free and ubiquitous in California - performed by doctors, nurse practitioners, midwives, and physician assistants, at 400 facilities, on college campuses, and via telehealth and a dozen sources by mail. Pushing unwanted abortion on our veteran communities is exploitative and is reproductive coercion."

POSITIONS

Sponsor: Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California

Support: Access Reproductive Justice
American Civil Liberties Union California Action
California Association of Veteran Service Agencies
California Medical Association
California Women's Law Center
Equality California
Lieutenant Governor Eleni Kounalakis
Reproductive Freedom for All California

Oppose: California Catholic Conference
California Family Council
Concerned Women for America

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