

## restrictions, data shows

Decline in Valley even higher

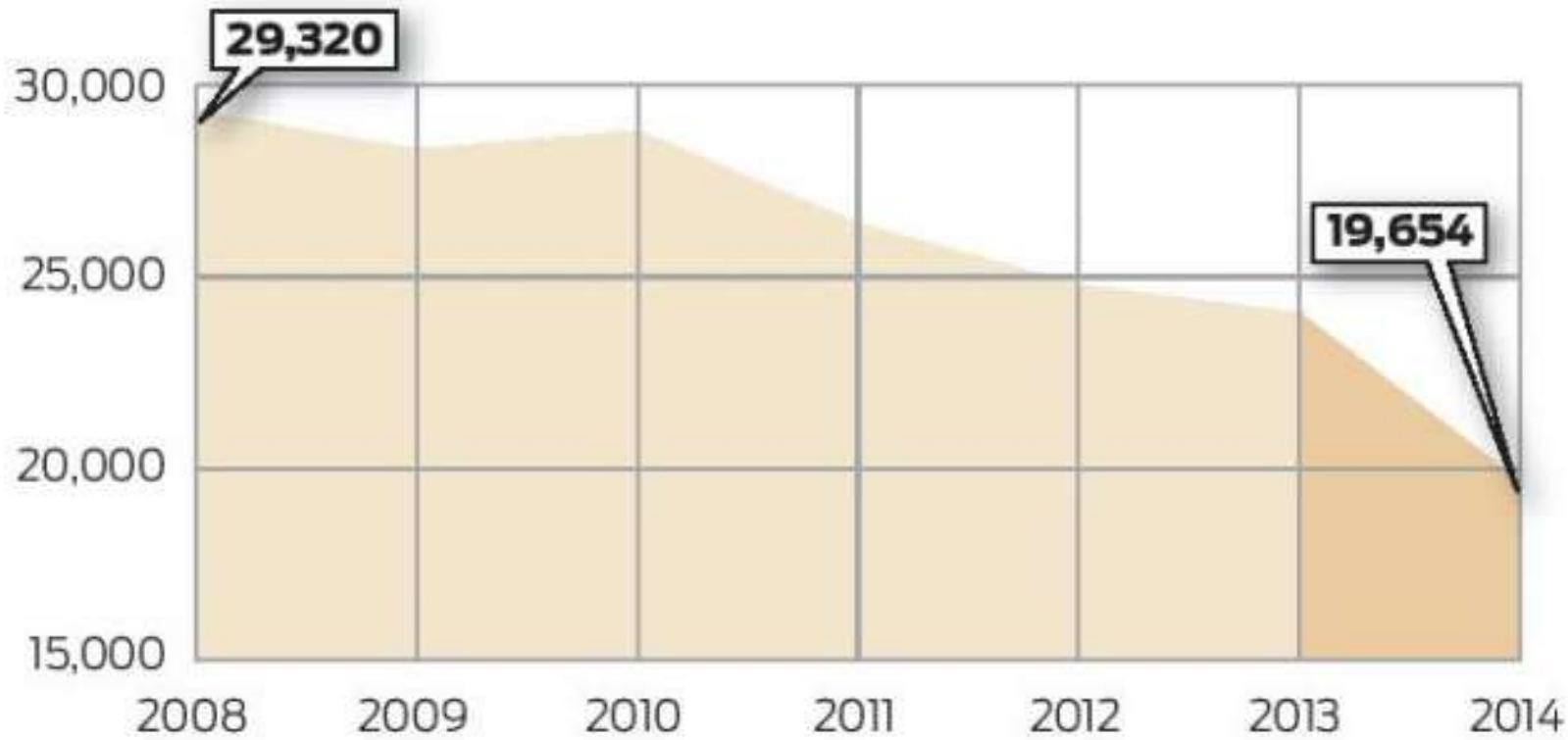
By Elizabeth Lepro, Staff Writer

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# Hispanic abortion numbers fall

While the state has reported a declining rate of abortions for Hispanic women since 2010, the year after House Bill 2 was enacted saw a drastic 18 percent drop.

► Total abortion numbers for Hispanic women in Texas, 2008-2014



► Total abortion numbers for Hispanic women in the the four counties in the Rio Grande Valley: Starr, Hidalgo, Willacy and Cameron



Source: Texas Department of State Health Services

San Antonio Express-News

The number of Texas Hispanic women who had abortions in 2014 dropped 18 percent compared with the year before, proving that the state’s now-overturned tough restrictions on clinics had an adverse effect on a woman’s constitutional right to the procedure, advocates said Friday.

“These numbers show the devastating impact that HB 2 had on Texans’ access to abortion care,” said Zoey Lichtenheld of NARAL Pro-Choice Texas. “It’s really painful to think about all the people who couldn’t access (clinics).”

In 2014, the year many of House Bill 2’s restrictions went into effect, the state reported 14 percent fewer abortions overall compared with 2013, from 63,849 to 54,902, according to figures released by the Texas Department of State Health Services on Thursday. But the percentage was higher for Hispanic women, who saw abortions reduced from 24,063 to 19,654.

The number of women affected in the Rio Grande Valley showed an even sharper drop, with the Valley's four counties — Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr and Willacy — seeing a decrease of 56 percent, from 1,741 to 773. In Hidalgo County alone, the decrease was nearly 60 percent, dropping from 1,211 to 507. More than 90 percent were Hispanic women.

By comparison, the number of African-American women who had abortions in 2014 statewide dropped by 7.6 percent, and the number of Anglo women dropped by 6.7 percent. The difference for Asian women was less than 1 percent.

Monday, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the Texas restrictions, which required abortion clinics to be certified as day surgery centers and doctors to have hospital privileges.

After the restrictions took effect, half of the estimated 40 abortion clinics in the state shut down. The Whole Woman's Health Clinic in McAllen closed several times before it was finally granted an exemption to the higher standards because it was the only abortion clinic remaining in the nearly 300 miles between San Antonio and the Mexico border.

"The Supreme Court agreed with what many of us knew to be true, that restricting access to safe abortion care does pose an undue burden on a woman and her right to an abortion," said Andrea Ferrigno, vice president of Whole Woman's Health. "The state's delayed data makes it clear that HB 2 was intended to work just like it did."

Opponents of HB 2 accused the state health agency of delaying the release of the abortion figures, which opponents believed would show that the tougher restrictions were affecting access, an idea supporters of the legislation rejected. The American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit to try to force the release of the information; state officials countered that the figures are usually released between March and June. The data came out Thursday, the last day of June.

Proponents of HB 2 said the regulations were meant to make abortions safer, but the numbers do not show any change in post-abortion complications. In 2013, about 30 women reported complications, compared with 22 women in 2014.

Michael Knuffke, of the San Antonio Family Association — which supported HB2 and called the Supreme Court's decision "tragic" — said the numbers do not mean that abortion procedures performed in facilities that are not ambulatory surgical centers are safe. He said the abortion providers should be required to meet the same standards as other surgical centers throughout the state and should not be allowed a "free pass."

"I think any reasonable person would say, well okay, there should be some standards when it comes to abortion surgeries," Knuffke said. "Having a standard is a good thing, it's not a bad thing."

Reproductive rights advocates such as Sofia Peña, who helped found South Texans for Reproductive Justice and La Frontera Fund, say limited access to abortion providers could have had an opposite effect on women in low-income areas far from the nearest clinic.

She said reduced abortion numbers could mean that women carried their pregnancies to term or were forced to pursue more dangerous, less effectual options, including herbal remedies, pills

because, I mean, who wouldn't support that? But a lot of people don't understand the intricacies."

A [2015 study](#) from the University of Texas at Austin found that self-induced abortion may be more common in Texas than in other states. Dr. Daniel Grossman, an investigator in that study, said the report also found that "Latinas living near the border were significantly more likely to be familiar with abortion self-induction, meaning that either they knew someone who had self-induced or they had done it themselves."

"There is ample evidence from other countries demonstrating that restricting access to legal abortion does not make it less common," Grossman said in an email. "It just makes it less safe."

Despite the Supreme Court ruling, Texas still has some of the most stringent abortion regulations in the country.

Women who want an abortion are required to make two visits to an abortion clinic: the first to receive an ultrasound and information regarding risks and alternatives, the second — 24 hours later — for the actual procedure.

Many women in South Texas cannot afford several trips to a clinic hundreds of miles away, or they have trouble finding care options for the children they already have when they travel, said Yvonne Gutierrez, director of Planned Parenthood Texas.

"When you are in need of access to abortion, every second (and) minute counts," Gutierrez said. "If you're talking about that long distance and you're also having to make several trips ... that is just not accessible."

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