

ABORTION New law in works to limit protests

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Santa Cruz moves to protect clients at abortion clinics.

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Santa Cruz took the first step Tuesday night toward copying a new San Jose law designed to protect women from harassment when they visit abortion clinics.

By a 6-0 vote, the council ordered City Attorney John Barisone to draft an ordinance similar to one passed Aug. 18 in San Jose.

That law — believed to be the first of its kind in California — makes it a misdemeanor for protesters within 100 feet of a health care facility to stand within eight feet of any person who asks them to step back.

Violations carry a fine of \$1,000 and six months in jail.

Birth of San Jose law

The San Jose law was drafted at the request of pro-choice leaders who have complained that abortion protesters forming blockades, shouting and waving signs outside abortion clinics have intimidated women seeking pregnancy tests, AIDS information and abortions.

"I heard about it and thought, 'What a great idea,'" said Santa Cruz Mayor Don Lane.

The draft ordinance is expected to come before the council in about a month.

Abortion opponents lobbied angrily in San Jose that the new law restricts freedom of speech. City attorneys disagreed, arguing that it does not outlaw protests, but merely establishes guidelines.

Santa Cruz has only one public abortion clinic, Planned Parenthood on Laurel Street. Abortions also are available at the offices of numerous private physicians.

Few problems locally

In Santa Cruz, a city nationally renowned for liberal politics, explosive abortion battles are rare.

There have been only about five large protests outside Santa Cruz abortion facilities during the last five years, with few arrests, said Police Chief Jack Bassett.

"We haven't had problems like Wichita (Kan.)," Bassett said. "(Opponents of) abortion here (are) few in number. In other communities there seems to be a much wider split."

No audience members addressed the topic Tuesday night.