

State sued over residency for prenatal care

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Sunday, April 27, 2008

Advocates for low-income women sued the state Thursday over a law that requires six months of residency in California to qualify for state-funded care during pregnancy and immediately after childbirth.

The 1991 law discriminates against new residents and also violates U.S. constitutional provisions that guarantee the right to travel between states without penalty, the nonprofit group Maternal and Child Health Access argued in a lawsuit in San Francisco Superior Court.

The law covers uninsured pregnant women whose incomes are too high for Medi-Cal but who make no more than 300 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$3,500 a month for a family of two. They are provided health coverage for themselves and their newborns, until 60 days after birth, and pay contributions of 1.5 percent of their household income.

A bill to eliminate the six-month residency requirement won legislative approval last year but was vetoed in October by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who said it would cost the state more than \$1 million a year.

The advocacy group said the program offers critically needed care.

"Prenatal health care can help prevent premature delivery and low birth weight," said Lynn Kersey, the group's executive director. "To deny working women health care simply because they are new to the state endangers the health of both the mother and the child."

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*This article appeared on page **B - 3** of the San Francisco Chronicle*