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Russian Lawmakers Oppose Ban on Abortions in Private Clinics – Vedomosti

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Russia's lower-house State Duma. **duma.gov.ru**

A group of Russian lawmakers has rejected a bill that would bar all private clinics in the country from providing abortion services, the business newspaper Vedomosti reported Monday, citing a letter sent to the speaker of Russia's lower house of parliament.

Members of the Russian State Duma's Committee on Health Protection insisted that a woman's right to choose where she has an abortion — be that at a private or state-run medical facility — should be preserved, according to the newspaper.

But lawmakers also said it was necessary to expand pre-abortion counseling services, which activists argue have been designed to discourage women from having the procedure.

"Deputies also recommend developing positive reproductive attitudes among women, informing them of [available] state support [for mothers], and also strengthening oversight of the work of private clinics," read the letter cited by Vedomosti.

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The bill outlawing abortions in private clinics was introduced in Russia's lower-house State Duma last week by regional lawmakers from the Nizhny Novgorod region.

On Thursday, President Vladimir Putin spoke out on the issue during his end-of-year press conference, saying that the country's "demographic problem would have been resolved if women chose to keep the life of the child after finding out they're pregnant." But the Russian leader also called for "respecting the rights and freedoms of women."

Putin advised lawmakers to "act with caution" when considering legal restrictions on abortion procedures.

While federal law in Russia maintains a generally liberal abortion policy, in recent weeks, lawmakers in several Russian regions and annexed Crimea have imposed local restrictions on abortion procedures.

Earlier this month, a law banning the so-called act of "coercing" women into undergoing an abortion was passed in the southwestern Kursk region. In November, all private clinics in the region stopped providing abortion services.

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