

Activists Make Final Push for Florida Pro-Life Bill

Pro-life advocates are making a last-ditch effort to lobby Florida Gov. Charlie Crist to sign “landmark” legislation that requires women seeking abortions to undergo an ultrasound.

HB 1143 passed in the Florida Legislature April 30 and was put on Crist’s desk this week. He has until June 22 to sign or veto the measure, but observers expect his response any day.

Bill supporters have called it one of the strongest pieces of pro-life legislation in the state’s history. The measure requires women seeking abortions to obtain a \$400 ultrasound beforehand and have the image explained to them. The bill also prohibits private health insurers that receive state or federal subsidies from providing coverage for abortions.

The American Civil Liberties Union and Planned Parenthood have been lobbying Crist to veto the bill, and have sent thousands of e-mails and calls to his office.

Bill supporters also have contacted Crist, with thousands urging him to sign the measure. The Florida Family Policy Council, which successfully mobilized grass-roots support for a gay marriage ban in the state, sent out an urgent alert this week encouraging pro-life advocates to make a last-ditch push for the measure.

“We have been aggressively educating people all across the state and are pulling out all the stops using every resource we have to lobby for this bill,” wrote John Stemberger, president of the Florida Family Policy Council.

Crist has hinted that he may veto the bill. In an interview with the Tampa Tribune editorial board last month, Crist said there is “probably not a whole lot” that keeps him from

opposing the measure.

"On two fronts it disturbs me," Crist told the Tribune. "That you would force a woman to go through this procedure ... almost seems mean-spirited. To have your government impose on you, listen to a lecture, then on top of that, you have to pay for it."

Crist is running for a U.S. Senate seat and recently changed from Republican to no party affiliation because of concerns he would not defeat newcomer Marco Rubio in the Republican primary. Rubio is pro-life and though Crist also has described himself as such, he recently removed a section from his campaign website stating that he "strongly believes in the sanctity of life."

On Thursday morning, 30 post-abortive women were to gather at the Capitol building in Tallahassee, Fla., to tell of the pain they experienced after having an abortion.

"For many of us, we were lied to about the fetal development of our children," said organizer Rebecca Porter, director of A Cry Without a Voice and a national leader for the pro-life group Operation Outcry, a group that encourages women to share their stories of how abortion hurt them.

"All of the women say that if they had been able to see the ultrasound they would have made a different choice, and they would have chosen life," Porter added.

Porter said she learned she was pregnant with twins during the last of her three abortions. "It was a very traumatic experience," she said. "I went into shock ... and they had to come in and hold me down. They wouldn't stop what they were doing."

She said she attempted suicide twice before coming to faith in Christ.

"I share in my testimony that I believe God allowed me to hear that so that it opened my eyes to what I was really doing," she said. "I believe that if I would have seen an ultrasound for the first abortion, then I wouldn't have gone on to have multiple abortions."

Porter's group will display in the Rotunda of the Capitol 235 baby shoes tagged with messages from their mothers or other family members that read, "Forgive me" or "I'll see you in heaven." Hundreds of additional shoes will be placed in the Capitol's courtyard to represent the 3,500 babies Porter said are aborted daily in the U.S.

"We are praying that Gov. Crist will at least, if he doesn't see us, he will have opportunity to see the baby shoes," Porter said.

The group will also deliver to Crist's office declarations from more than 300 women who say they were hurt by abortion. Similar testimonies have been used in legal challenges to *Roe v. Wade*.
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Teams from Bound4Life, a pro-life prayer ministry founded by Lou Engle, have been praying in Tallahassee for Crist to sign the bill. And Porter believes the women's testimonies will make a spiritual impact.

"We overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony," Porter said. "We want to just put our testimony out into the spiritual realm there in the Rotunda. And especially since the Bound4Life people will be praying at the same time. We just feel like this is something that we need to do for our faith."