

Alabama Senate Passes Bill Tightening Rules for Abortion Clinics

The Alabama Senate passed an abortion bill on Tuesday critics say would limit access to the procedure with stricter requirements for clinics that provide it.

The Senate passed the bill on a vote of 22-10, after the House passed a similar bill in February. A committee will reconcile the two bills before the proposed legislation goes to the Alabama Governor, Dr. Robert Bentley, who is expected to sign it into law.

A similar bill in Mississippi is threatening to close the state's lone abortion clinic, as a federal judge ponders its future after the clinic filed a lawsuit. The Alabama bill follows passage of new anti-abortion laws in North Dakota and Arkansas in the past month.

The Alabama bill, called The Women's Health and Safety Act, would mandate that an Alabama-licensed physician be present at every abortion and those doctors would be required to have admitting privileges at local hospitals.

Most clinics hire out-of-town physicians to provide abortion procedures and partner with local doctors who have hospital admitting privileges to provide follow-up care.

Critics say the bill would make it difficult or impossible for the clinics to do business.

"This legislation will make it harder to access health care, which will put women's health in danger," said Planned Parenthood Southeast Vice President of Public Policy Nikema Williams, following the vote to pass the bill.

The bill would also require reporting the name of the baby's father to law enforcement if the abortion is performed on a minor less than 16 years of age.

Alabama has four remaining abortion clinics, since the clinic bombed by Eric Rudolph lost its license to operate on May 18, 2012. Rudolph, who killed two people and injured 150 others in a series of bombings in the late 1990s, is incarcerated in the supermax prison in Florence, Colorado.

State Sen. Harri Anne Smith, an independent and one of Alabama's five women senators, said she opposed abortion but expressed fear that the bill was unconstitutional and would attract a lawsuit.

"Upholding the Constitution is a very serious matter, as is putting life at stake," said Smith. "Women will resort to backroom procedures and taking their own lives."

State Sen. Linda Coleman, a Democrat, cited the relative safety of abortion procedures, with two deaths in Alabama reported last year resulting from procedures.

"And how many fatalities for the unborn child?" retorted the bill's sponsor, Republican state Sen. Scott Beason.

While Beason touted the bill as a safety measure, opponents called it an attempt to limit the rights of women. Two hundred people gathered around the capitol at a mid-day rally to protest the law.

"You don't have any business in my home, in my bedroom or in my body," said Coleman.

Lawmakers voted down a proposed amendment that would have prohibited hospitals from denying admitting privileges to abortion doctors solely because they performed the procedures.

Lawmakers in several states have passed new restrictions on abortion rights in the past two years, including laws approved

in the last month in North Dakota and Arkansas that are seen as direct new challenges to the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Roe v. Wade* that legalized abortion in 1973.

North Dakota in late March became the first state to approve a ban on most abortions once a fetal heartbeat can be detected, about six weeks into pregnancy, and the first to ban abortions solely because of fetal genetic anomalies.

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