

Florida Woman Tricked Into Abortion Seeks Fetal Protection Laws

Remee Jo Lee was excited in the winter of 2013 over her pregnancy with a baby she already named Memphis, even though her new boyfriend envisioned a very different future.

This winter, John Welden, formerly a pre-med student from a privileged background, sits in prison serving a nearly 14-year federal sentence for tricking Lee into taking an **abortion** pill.

Meanwhile, Lee is in Florida's capital, changing hearts and minds instead of diapers, to pass a new state law that would set criminal penalties for causing a pregnant woman to lose her fetus regardless of how early in the pregnancy.

"This is the most devastating experience for me. It just never goes away. I deal with this every day of my life," Lee told the Senate Judiciary Committee on Tuesday.

"Every day, when I see a changing table in the bathroom, I remember what I've lost, I deal with the stress of this thing."

Current Florida law applies only to the killing of a fetus which is far enough along to survive outside the womb.

Because Lee's fetus was less than 7 weeks old, Welden was charged instead under the federal Unborn Victims of Violence Act, punishable by life in prison.

In a deal with prosecutors, he pleaded guilty to charges of product tampering and with bodily harm, and conspiracy to commit mail fraud.

The expansion of fetal protection in Florida failed to pass last year. After hearing from Lee, a Senate panel voted 6-2 to move the bill along.

Welden admitted in court that he gave Lee a bottle of pills labeled amoxicillin and told her that his father, an obstetrician who confirmed the pregnancy, prescribed the antibiotic for her for a bacterial infection.

In reality, the pill bottle contained Cytotec, known generically as misoprostol, a stomach ulcer medication which can cause abortion. Welden obtained the pills using his father's prescription pad, scratched off identifying marks on the pills and faked the bottle label with the help of a local pharmacy technician.

Lee began cramping and bleeding, and found out at the hospital she lost the baby six weeks and five days into the pregnancy.

Prosecutors indicted him in May after police recorded a phone call between Welden and Lee in which he admitted what he had done.

Lee testified in support of a bill by Senator Kelli Stargel, that would make the killing or injury of an unborn baby a separate offense when a pregnant woman is killed or injured.

An offender would not have to know a victim was pregnant, in order to be charged with separate offenses. Penalties would depend on the nature of the offense, such as assault and battery or murder, but a maximum life sentence could be imposed under Stargel's bill for killing an unborn infant.

Killing the mother could be punishable by death.

Stargel emphasized that her bill is not aimed at abortion, and would not apply penalties when a woman seeks to have a pregnancy terminated.

Her bill now goes to the Senate Rules Committee for scheduling

of floor debate after the legislative session convenes March 4. A companion House measure is pending in that chamber's judiciary committee.

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