

State Approves Most Restrictive Abortion Legislation in History

Oklahoma's Legislature gave final approval Thursday to another Texas-style anti-abortion bill that providers say will be the most restrictive in the nation once the governor signs it.

The bill is part of an aggressive push in Republican-led states across the country to scale back abortion rights. It comes on the heels of a leaked draft opinion from the U.S. Supreme Court that suggests justices are considering weakening or overturning the landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision that legalized abortion nearly 50 years ago.

The bill by Collinsville Republican Rep. Wendi Stearman would prohibit all abortions, except to save the life of a pregnant woman or if the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest that has been reported to law enforcement.

"Is our goal to defend the right to life or isn't it?" Stearman asked her colleagues before the bill passed on a 73-16 vote mostly along party lines.

The bill is one of at least three anti-abortion bills sent this year to Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt, who has indicated he'll sign it. Another Texas-style abortion bill that prohibits the procedure after cardiac activity can be detected in the embryo, which experts say is about six weeks, already has taken effect and has already dramatically curtailed the practice in Oklahoma. Another bill set to take effect this summer would make it a felony to perform an abortion, punishable by up to 10 years in prison. That bill contains no exceptions for rape or incest.

"At this point, we are preparing for the most restrictive

environment politicians can create: a complete ban on abortion with likely no exceptions,” said Emily Wales, interim president and CEO of Planned Parenthood Great Plains, which stopped providing abortions at two of its Oklahoma clinics after the six-week ban took effect earlier this month. “It’s the worst-case scenario for abortion care in the state of Oklahoma.”

Like the Texas law, the Oklahoma bill would allow private citizens to sue abortion providers or anyone who helps a woman obtain an abortion. After the U.S. Supreme Court allowed that mechanism to remain in place, other Republican-led states sought to copy Texas’ ban. Idaho’s governor signed the first copycat measure in March, although it has been temporarily blocked by the state’s Supreme Court.

After Texas passed its bill last year, there was a dramatic reduction in the number of abortions performed in that state, with many women going to Oklahoma and other surrounding states for the procedure.

There are legal challenges pending in Oklahoma to both the bill to criminalize abortion and the six-week Texas ban, but the courts have so far failed to stop either measure. {eo}

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