

Abortion bill advances at State Capitol

The bill is now off to the full House for consideration

By: Glen Mills

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SALT LAKE CITY (ABC4 News)- A controversial bill to limit abortion rights takes a step forward on Utah's Capitol Hill.

People on both sides of the issue, including Utah's biggest healthcare provider, lined up to share thoughts before it got the green light from committee. Inside a packed committee hearing room.

"If we are itching to spend up to \$3 million in public funds on reducing abortion, we shouldn't burn it up on state attorneys to defend a bill we already know is unconstitutional," said Lauren Simpson with Alliance for a Better Utah.

An emotional debate on abortion in Utah.

"I had an abortion. I was only 12 weeks along. I shudder to think what I would have gone through had it been a later term abortion. I've spent 40 years coming to terms with that," said Mary Taylor with Pro-Life Utah.

It all centers around House Bill 136, sponsored by Representative Cheryl Acton.

The bill would change state law to prohibit abortion after 18 weeks.

"New York and Virginia, for example, have the abortion laws that they want, but Utah does not. I believe that we should be able to enact reasonable abortion laws that reflect the will of the people of Utah," said Acton, West Jordan.

The bill does provide some exceptions for when the mother's life is in danger, and if the unborn child is diagnosed with a severe brain abnormality.

Utah's largest healthcare provider, Intermountain Healthcare, is speaking against the bill. They say abnormalities not covered under the bill can go undetected until after 18 weeks.

"These situations are gut-wrenching for families and their decision process is thoughtful and deep. Their autonomy and their ability to decide what's best for their individual circumstances is the only thing that makes these unbearable circumstances a bit more bearable," said Cara Heuser, MD.

Supporters argue those lives deserve a chance.

"The state does have a compelling interest in protecting lives, human lives, and, in looking after the health and the safety and the well-being of the mothers as well," said Merrilee Boyack with Family Watch International, Utah Chapter.

The House Judiciary Committee passed the bill on a 7-5 vote. All three Democrats and two Republicans voted no.

It now goes to the full House for consideration.

The ACLU of Utah says a court challenge is likely if the bill becomes law.

