

Bill to prevent abortions after fetal Down syndrome diagnosis headed to the Utah Senate

Salt Lake Tribune

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2/22/29

<https://www.sltrib.com/news/politics/2019/02/22/bill-prevent-abortions/>

Legislation setting forth a potential ban on abortions performed because of a fetal Down syndrome diagnosis is closing in on final passage after clearing a Senate committee Friday.

The panel of lawmakers voted 4-2 to send the bill to the full Senate, with the committee's two Democrats opposing the decision and all four Republicans present voting in favor.

Rep. Karianne Lisonbee, the sponsor of HB166, testified that she hears from many parents of children with Down syndrome who report that their doctors initially suggested abortion after the prenatal genetic test results came back. Her proposal would use education — and a potential ban on procedures conducted solely because of a Down syndrome diagnosis — to push back.



A similar version of her bill failed in last year's session, with legislative attorneys declaring it was likely to draw a constitutional challenge.

Lisonbee, R-Clearfield, says this year's bill addresses this concern by stipulating that the abortion ban component will only take effect if the courts uphold these types of laws. Other parts of the bill, which would kick in right away, would require the Utah Department of Health to create a webpage with resources on Down syndrome and direct physicians to share this information with their patients.

But a representative from the American Civil Liberties Union of Utah argued that the abortion prohibition language is problematic and inserts the government into private medical decisions. "It is not the place of the state to decide when someone and whether someone should become a parent," Jason Stevenson of the ACLU said.

And there are better ways of reducing abortion, including improved sex education, good health care, lower-cost contraceptives and family-friendly economic policies, said Lauren Simpson with the left-leaning Alliance for a Better Utah.

Parents of children with Down syndrome and individuals with the genetic disorder addressed lawmakers in support of Lisonbee's bill.

Sadie Herring, an Orem mother of two children with Down syndrome, said her family's day-to-day isn't necessarily easy, but she spoke about how individuals with disabilities enrich the lives of those around them.

"Their differences do not mean their lives are not valuable," she said.

The House has already approved Lisonbee's bill, which will now go to the full Senate for a vote.