

# Utah abortion ban, ultrasound requirement bills approved by committees

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By Ashley Imlay

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SALT LAKE CITY — Two Utah bills addressing abortion — one a ban and the other requiring doctors to show women their ultrasound before performing the abortion — received favorable recommendations in committees Monday.

SB174, which would prohibit abortion except in circumstances including rape, received a 10-3 favorable recommendation from the House Health and Human Services Committee, moving it to a vote on the floor.

“The bill is an important bill for a lot of reasons,” said bill sponsor Sen. Dan McCay, R-Riverton.

As the U.S. Supreme Court considers the constitutionality of abortion-related restrictions in other states like Louisiana, McCay said the bill in Utah would tell the court “that there other states that are willing to stand at the side of the unborn when it is time.”

SB174 would prohibit abortion except in cases of rape or incest; to prevent the death or “substantial impairment” of the woman if she gives birth; or if the fetus has a lethal birth defect or severe brain abnormality that would cause it to be in a vegetative state. The bill would make it a second-degree felony to perform an abortion that doesn’t meet one of those criteria.

McCay clarified during the hearing that if a woman performed an abortion on herself, she could face felony charges, which drew swift criticism from advocacy group Alliance for a Better Utah after the meeting.

“If Roe v. Wade is overturned and this bill becomes law, the most vulnerable women in Utah will pay a tremendous price. Abortion should remain safe and legal, and a woman should have the agency to make that choice in consultation with her doctor, her family and her faith — not her politicians,” Lauren Simpson, policy director for Better Utah, said in a statement.

In response to a question during the hearing, McCay said it would not impact the use of morning-after pills to divert pregnancy. When asked if it would impact underage girls who

become pregnant, McCay said that under the bill, they would not be able to receive an abortion unless in the cases of the exemptions.

Several people showed up to the hearing to speak for or against the bill.

Meredith Reed, a mother of four and former Air Force chaplain, said that in late 2009, when she and her husband were still newlyweds, they found they were expecting their first child. But they discovered a serious developmental abnormality with the fetus, and after several weeks of tests, they believed “the most loving and humane choice we could make was to terminate the pregnancy.”

Reed said the decision was “deeply personal” and “not one that should be made by politicians.”

Rep. Ray Ward, R-Bountiful, said many other countries have similar laws.

“But in most of those other countries where they have this policy, maternal death from when they have an abortion is one of the highest causes of maternal death,” Ward said.

McCay responded that it’s a “fair concern,” but none of those countries have the “advanced social services that we have as a country.”

“I think there’s a lot of things we’ve done since the early ’70s. ... I think there’s a lot of things that have changed as a society that have made it so that the United States policy will be better than those other countries,” McCay said.

During the meeting, Ward suggested the committee vote to study the issue during the interim.

Addressing the concern that prohibiting elective abortion would cause women to seek dangerous back-alley procedures, Mary Taylor, of Pro-Life Utah, emphasized that there are repercussions to many women who choose to end a pregnancy.

Forty years ago, Taylor says she had an abortion and spent the following four decades dealing with depression, substance abuse and suicidal thoughts.

“And as president of Pro-Life Utah, we deal with women every day, we pick up the broken pieces of women who have had access to abortion,” she said.

#### Abortion ultrasound bill

HB364 would require the medical provider to describe the images produced in the ultrasound and make the fetal heartbeat audible, if possible. The woman would be able to choose not to look at the images or listen to the heartbeat, according to the bill, as well as ask that the sound of the heartbeat be reduced or turned off.

Rep. Steve Christiansen, R-South Jordan, introduced a new substitute to his abortion ultrasound bill to a Senate committee. The changes would “reduce the burden on the woman” by reducing the trips she needs to make to a doctor by one, he said.

The change also says the woman can receive a transabdominal ultrasound at any stage of the pregnancy to fulfill the requirement.

Evan Vickers, R-Cedar City, questioned how the potential fines were arrived at — a doctor who fails to give an ultrasound would face a fine of up to \$100,000 on the first instance and \$250,000 on later instances.

“In my opinion, the penalty needs to be significant to make sure that women are fully, completely and truthfully informed before making that critical decision,” Christiansen said.

Though he later said he would vote for the bill, Vickers called the fine to doctors “heavy-handed” and recommended Christiansen take a “deeper look” at the bill during the interim.

Taylor called the bill “the most important pro-life bill that I have ever been involved with.”

The favorable recommendation from the Senate Health and Human Services committee moves it to a vote in the full Senate.