

# Anti-Abortion Bills Advance As Lawmaker Draws Criticism For ‘Magic Word’ Comments

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SALT LAKE CITY, Utah — Two anti-abortion bills advanced on Utah’s Capitol Hill Monday, including a measure that would bar almost all abortions except for those done in cases of rape, incest and potentially grave health problems for mother or unborn baby.

S.B. 174 cleared the House Health and Human Services Committee, moving next to the full House for potential final approval.

The measure comes as the U.S. Supreme Court is reviewing a Louisiana law requiring hospital admitting privileges for abortion doctors. Other state laws banning abortions after a heartbeat is detected in the unborn are also facing legal challenges.

“When you look at where the State of Utah has been historically and where we still are today, it’s important that we let the Supreme Court know – as well as other states – what good policy looks like when it comes to an abortion ban,” Rep. Dan McCay, R-Riverton, said following the hearing.

Ashley Liewer was among those who came out in opposition of the bill.

“It’s totally disappointing,” Liewer said. “It’s going to limit access to absolutely necessary and vital healthcare for women – and not just women but women and young teens as well.”

## H.B. 364

Meanwhile, the fifth substitute version of H.B. 364 received a favorable recommendation in the Senate Health and Human Services Committee Monday afternoon to advance to the full Senate. The legislation would require abortion providers to conduct ultrasounds prior to the procedure, showing and describing the images to the pregnant woman and playing back audio of the heartbeat if possible.

According to the measure’s sponsor, Rep. Steve Christiansen (R-West Jordan), the latest modifications to the bill reduce the number of visits made to a doctor by one.

While the ACLU of Utah spoke out against the bill, multiple women who had regretted past abortions spoke in favor of the changes.

“What we see in (a post-abortive support group) is that women do struggle,” said Deanna Holland of Pro-Life Utah. “Some of the women have struggled with self-harm, some of them struggle with substance abuse, some of them struggle with depression, anxiety.”

## H.B. 65 Aftermath

Last week, another bill was tabled that would have eliminated a requirement for abortion doctors to verify reports of rape and incest with police.

Monday, a woman who testified in favor of the measure criticized two members of the House Judiciary Committee for comments made during the hearing.

Ashley Weitz related her experience as a victim of sexual abuse at age 12 and said she felt “invalidated” when Rep. Brady Brammer, R-Pleasant Grove, questioned her qualifications to speak on the issue.

“Are you a licensed psychiatrist?” he quizzed.

Weitz, who has worked as a victim advocate and an educator on trauma-informed care practices, said she couldn’t believe what else the lawmaker said regarding claims of rape and his fears about the measure.

“This creates a ‘magic word’ exception without any verification,” Brammer said. “You just have to say the magic words.”

Weitz said she viewed the statement as “immensely harmful.”

“To imply that women would stay pregnant knowing they wanted to access abortion to at the very last minute use this ‘magic word’ of victimization – it’s a slap in the face to victims,” Weitz said. “It’s a slap in the face of all of the work we’re trying to do to validate victims and to believe victims and to encourage them to reclaim all of that autonomy that has been lost.”

Rep. Karianne Lisonbee, R-Clearfield, echoed a sentiment similar to Brammer’s.

“This policy would open the door for late-term abortion by simply saying, ‘I was raped,’” Lisonbee said during the committee hearing.

Brammer did continue on during the hearing to acknowledge the concern for re-traumatization, but said that didn’t override concern for the life of the child.

He issued a statement Monday essentially reasserting his position.

“Unfortunately, the bill would permit a late-term abortion under the rape exception without filing a police report,” Brammer wrote. “Under this bill, such reporting would still be required for underage victims, but not for adults. The state has a public interest to encourage all women to report rape, protect victims of rape, and protecting unborn children generally. While reporting a rape is undoubtedly difficult, reporting is necessary to protect both the woman and the unborn child.”

Lisonbee also issued a statement backing up her stance on the potential for perpetrators of sexual crimes not to face justice.

“Claiming rape without filing a police report leaves others vulnerable to increased criminal activity,” she wrote. “When there is no accountability, criminals feel empowered to commit more crime.”

Holland said she believed in general lawmakers had shown sensitivity in dealing with a difficult topic.

“They listen to both sides, they’re very respectful and they really do think about the minute details of these laws,” Holland said.

Weitz said, however, she has generally struggled with lawmakers’ approach to abortion this session.

“I remember being in a meeting where a senator said, ‘Well you don’t have any idea how I feel about all of the criticism I’m getting,’” Weitz said. “It was a little ironic that we were being asked to consider his feelings about a bill that he was bringing forward to insert the state into these very intimate, very personal – very, very private experiences. And that has been a theme, I have felt, this session – of being asked to consider these mostly male legislators’ feelings about women’s healthcare. And that’s been hard.”

