

Utah ultrasound abortion bill greenlighted by House committee

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SALT LAKE CITY — A bill that would require doctors to show a woman her ultrasound before performing an abortion narrowly passed 6-5 out of a House committee Tuesday, moving it to a vote in the full House.

Meanwhile, a bill that would remove the requirement that a doctor performing an abortion on a victim of rape verify that she reported the rape to law enforcement was held in the House Judiciary Committee.

Ultrasound requirement

In his second chance presenting ultrasound bill [HB364](#), Rep. Steve Christiansen, R-West Jordan, said it “preserves agency.”

“In the end, it is (a woman’s) decision. All we are asking is that she receive the information that is necessary so that she can make an informed decision. The risks are absolutely significant to the woman, physical and emotional,” Christiansen said.

Those critical of the bill had argued on Friday it would add trauma to a woman by forcing her to go through a procedure that isn’t considered a medical standard. Women already get an ultrasound to determine the age of the fetus before an abortion, but providers aren’t required to show the ultrasound image to them.

[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.

During Tuesday’s meeting, Christiansen introduced a substitute bill that clarifies a doctor should only turn up the sound on a heartbeat if it is medically safe to do so.

The change came after a Utah Medical Association representative told the committee Friday the organization opposed the bill because raising the sound of the heartbeat on an ultrasound of fetuses under 20 weeks can cause damage.

When Tuesday's meeting opened for public comment, Caitlin Powell said she experienced an unplanned pregnancy at 20 and was filled with anxiety. When she went into an ultrasound, she found she was 10 weeks pregnant and saw a "little baby."

"And in that moment, I stepped into my power. I was going to have this baby," she said.

She agreed with Christiansen that "knowledge is power," adding that "women deserve to feel powerful."

Powell urged the legislators to "give women the full picture to see and understand the information through an ultrasound."

Marina Lowe, legislative and policy counsel with ACLU of Utah, said the group considers the bill to be medically unnecessary, turning the right to get an ultrasound into a mandate.

Rep. Brian King, D-Salt Lake City, said he appreciates Christiansen's intent and "his desire to do the right thing."

"But it's troubling to me that we are mandating something that is not medically necessary," King said, echoing concerns he expressed before about "dictating" to professionals what they need to do.

Rep. Steve Waldrip, R-Eden, also said the bill goes beyond what he's comfortable with in governing medical specialists.

Addressing those concerns, Christiansen said women do not always receive an ultrasound prior to birth or an abortion. He argued that there are times standard of care benefit from legislative policy, calling the issue one of those cases "because of the risk" to a mother's health if she receives an abortion.

Rep. Cheryl Acton, R-West Jordan, said she believes women are often "intentionally deceived" when going to get an abortion.

"I also believe that knowledge is power, and we empower women when we give them knowledge . . . that it will help women when they make that decision in the end," Acton said.

Rape reporting

The second abortion bill in the meeting didn't fare so well.

"While I certainly would love for every case of rape to be reported to police," many women either don't have access or choose not to report to police, sometimes due to risk, said HB65 sponsor Rep. Jen Dailey-Provost, D-Salt Lake City.

Less than 1% of rapes result in a conviction, she added. And following a rape, many women are simply trying to survive the circumstances. The bill is about trusting victims and allowing them to make decisions for their own health care needs, Dailey-Provost said.

But some in the committee expressed concern that the bill would benefit human traffickers and abusers — and that it would open the door for women to be able to legally receive abortions after viability by using a “magic word.”

Dailey-Provost argued that the current reporting requirement doesn’t help fight human traffickers and rapists, but the bill would reduce the trauma a woman has to undergo if she says she is raped.

“I think that we have an obligation to trust women to make the decisions that are best for them in their situation. And categorically disregarding any woman’s rape as not viable or relevant because she makes a decision that a police report is not in her or her family’s best interest is not a judgment call that I believe that the Legislature should be making,” Dailey-Provost said.

When the meeting opened for public comment, Nicholeen Peck, with the Empower Families Coalition, said the group opposes the bill “because it is absolutely appalling to us that a woman would not be given proper help if she has been abused in this way, if she has been raped.”

The bill was held in the committee.