

HB 136 and the anti-abortion push in Utah

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The operator doesn't mention abortion when you call the Planned Parenthood Salt Lake Health Center. "Thank you for calling Planned Parenthood ... you do not need an appointment for pregnancy tests, emergency contraception and HIV testing."

Several hundred, if not more, of the women who underwent the 2,923 abortions in Utah in 2017 likely listened to the same message before visiting one of the two Planned Parenthood clinics in Utah that offer abortion services. 2019 has been a heyday for anti-abortion organizations across the US, and with the passing of Utah House Bill 136 amidst numerous states' anti-abortion laws, many Utahns are evaluating their stance on abortion.

Life after abortion

Mary Taylor said she doesn't remember if she was 19 or 20 when she underwent an abortion during her 11th week of pregnancy almost 40 years ago. She says she only remembers it as a dark and painful time.

Taylor said she was raised in a liberal family and assumed that abortion was the natural choice to make when she became pregnant unexpectedly. Uneasy about the decision, Taylor visited a Planned Parenthood facility to learn about her options.

Taylor said a Planned Parenthood counselor told her the abortion procedure wouldn't remove a baby, but would instead "remove a clump of cells the size of a pencil point."

Taylor said the counselor urged her to have the abortion completed that very afternoon, warning that waiting would increase the cost of the procedure and likelihood of health complications. As a result, Taylor said she underwent an abortion during a vulnerable and difficult time and the experience plagued her for years.

During her second pregnancy, Taylor said she read books tracking her baby's development. At 11 weeks, Taylor read about her developing child's heart, brain and movements. Taylor said she thought of the 11-week-old fetus she had given up years ago and realized she had been misinformed.

"Was the counselor inept? Was she trying to mislead me? These questions plagued me for years and years. It was painful and dark," Taylor said.

Taylor's experience led her to join pro-life groups and to found Pro-Life Utah four years ago. Taylor now works to combat the misinformation she received as a young woman.

Taylor said she has learned through working with countless young women that her experience wasn't unique. Every year, she said, several thousand young women enter the two Utah abortion clinics in Salt Lake City and receive the same message she did: abortion is not killing and removing a baby from their body.

Utah legislation

With the signing of Missouri's eight-week abortion ban and Louisiana's six-week ban, a total of 27 abortion bans have now been enacted across 12 states in 2019. Between January 1, 2011, and May 31, 2019, 479 abortion restrictions were enacted in 33 states, accounting for more than a third of the 1,271 abortion restrictions enacted since Roe v. Wade was decided in 1973, according to the [Guttmacher Institute](#).

States are fighting to create stronger anti-abortion laws with anti-abortion advocates optimistic about challenging Roe v. Wade before the new conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court.

In Utah, one of these leaders is Rep. Cheryl Acton, R-West Jordan, who sponsored [HB 136](#) in the 2019 Utah Legislative Session. The bill restricts abortions performed after 18 weeks, and is currently being fought in a lawsuit by Planned Parenthood and the ACLU.



Rep. Cheryl Acton, R-West Jordan, sponsored HB 136 during the 2019 Utah Legislative Session. HB 136 limits abortion to 18 weeks, and is currently being fought in a lawsuit by Planned Parenthood and the ACLU. (AP Photo/Rick Bowmer, File)

Acton was approached by Pro-Life Utah President Mary Taylor and Utah Eagle Forum President Gayle Ruzicka in October 2018. The anti-abortion leaders asked Acton if she would be interested in sponsoring a bill limiting abortion to 15 weeks.

"When approached about sponsoring the bill, I considered it for a few days. The more I thought about it, the more I realized this is life and death, and then I threw myself into it. The more I learned, the more I wanted to do as much as possible for the pro-life cause," Acton said in an interview in May.

Utah law previously limited abortion to 22 weeks, the point at which a fetus is considered viable, or able to survive outside the womb. Acton’s push for HB 136 focused on pain caused to unborn fetuses and the mental health of women who undergo abortions.

“From the outset, I was determined to present the bill as reasonably as possible. I want people to be convinced based on the facts and reason,” Acton said. “The bill provides every reasonable accommodation and relies on medical advances. Eighteen weeks is the length of an NFL football season — that’s a reasonable amount of time to make an abortion decision.”

Acton’s bill will ban only a small fraction of abortions in Utah. Only 73 of the 2,923 abortions conducted in 2017 were for pregnancies past 18 weeks, according to [Utah Vital Statistics](#). Acton said she views her bill as a reasonable restriction that she hopes will lead to future restriction of all elective abortions in Utah.

“I definitely think someday (Roe v. Wade) will be reversed, and I hope that day will be sooner than later,” Acton said.

Acton said she would like to see abortion laws return to what they were like in 1973.

“Medical advances in what we now know about the physical, emotional and fertility health of a mother, the dismemberment procedure used and fetal pain perception — all of these things should be taken into account when considering Roe v. Wade. Internationally, most countries limit abortion to the first trimester,” Acton said.

Utah passed similar legislation banning abortion after 20 weeks in 1991, [legislation that was overturned](#) by an appeals court after being challenged by Planned Parenthood and ACLU.

Marina Lowe, a member of the Legislative and Policy Counsel for ACLU of Utah, said Acton’s bill denies decades of judicial rulings.

“HB 136 interferes with a woman’s most personal medical decisions and violates fundamental constitutional principles that courts have repeatedly affirmed,” Lowe said in an ACLU of Utah [press release](#). “The decision to continue or end a pregnancy is one that must be made by a woman in consultation with those she trusts, including her physician, family and faith leaders.”

A 2018 [Utah Policy Poll](#) found that 52% of Utahns believe abortion should be illegal in most cases, and 8% believe abortion should be illegal in all cases.

These numbers align with Utah demographics, where 55% of Utahns are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 13% are Protestant and 5% are Catholics. Utah also has a birthrate 25% higher than the U.S. average.

Which of the following best describes your feelings toward abortion?

Survey by Dan Jones & Associates. Conducted May 15-25, 2018. 615 likely Utah voters. Margin of error +/- 4.0%

It should be legal in all cases

11%

It should be legal in most cases

28%

It should be illegal in most cases

52%

It should be illegal in all cases

8%

Don't know

2%

Source: [UtahPolicy.com](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

The majority of Utahns believe abortion should be illegal in most cases, according to a 2018 Utah Policy Poll. (Utah Policy)

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [statement on abortion](#) says, “Elective abortion for personal or social convenience is contrary to the will and the commandments of God.”

The Church denounces the practice of abortion with the exception of the mother’s or fetus’ health, rape or incest.

These exceptions make up a small number of abortions that occur in the United States, with under 2% of abortions in 2016 occurring for the physical health of mother or child.

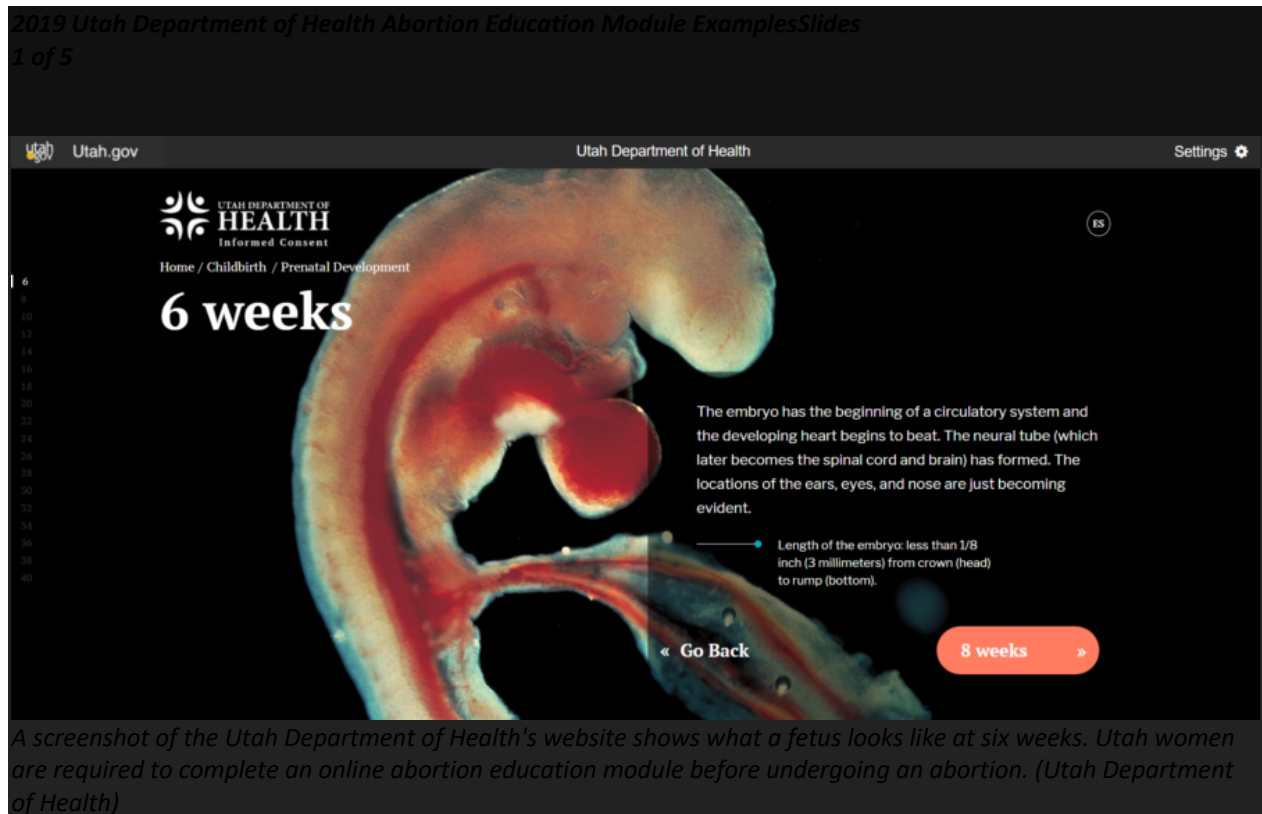
Navigating the world of abortion information

For Mary Taylor, education about abortion is crucial to changing cultural beliefs and state and national laws permitting abortion.

“Many people are unaware of how many abortions we have in Utah every year,” Taylor said. “Many don’t know how many happen and how barbaric it is. Education is so important.”

Of second-trimester abortions, which comprise just under 7.4% of abortions in Utah in 2015 according to the CDC, most employ a procedure called dilation and evacuation, according to Acton. Dilation and evacuation involve crushing and dismembering a fetus in the womb until it dies from blood loss, after which its body parts are extracted piece by piece through the cervix.

For those who are pro-life, knowing the specific abortion laws of their state, how many abortions are taking place and how these abortions are conducted can allow them to feel more confident in taking an educated stance on social media and in conversation, Taylor said.





Home / Childbirth / Prenatal Development

10 weeks

- 4
- 6
- 8
- 10**
- 12
- 14
- 16
- 18
- 20
- 22
- 24
- 26
- 28
- 30
- 32
- 34
- 36
- 38
- 40



The beginnings of organs are present, although not fully developed or in their final locations. The shape of the lungs is nearly formed. The intestines are beginning to coil. The diaphragm is completed. The digits of the hand are separated but webbed. Eyes and ears are more obvious. Tongue and taste buds are present. Reflex activity begins but movements are too slight to be felt.

Length of the embryo: 1 - 1 1/4 inch (30 millimeters) from crown (head) to rump (bottom).

◀ Go Back

12 weeks ▶

This screenshot shows and describes the fetus at 10 weeks. (Utah Department of Health)



18 weeks

- 4
- 6
- 8
- 10
- 12
- 14
- 16
- 18
- 20
- 22
- 24
- 26
- 28
- 30
- 32
- 34
- 36
- 38
- 40

Swallowing and chest movements are clearly present. The ears stand out from the head now. Muscles are spontaneously active. The pregnant woman may start to feel movements now.

Length of the fetus: 5.5 inches (140 millimeters) from crown (head) to rump (bottom).

« Go Back

20 weeks »



24 weeks

- 4
- 6
- 8
- 10
- 12
- 14
- 16
- 18
- 20
- 22
- 24
- 26
- 28
- 30
- 32
- 34
- 36
- 38
- 40

Most of the organs are now formed and the fetus enters a period of growth and further organ development.

Length of the fetus: 11.8 inches (300 millimeters) from crown (head) to heel.

« Go Back

26 weeks »

Abortion Procedures

Home / Information Module / Abortion / Abortion Procedures

 Preliminary Questions

 Childbirth


 Abortion

Abortion Procedures

Abortion Risks

 Adoption

 Aid Resources

 Summary

Abortion Procedures

Abortion is the ending of a pregnancy and will result in the death of the embryo or fetus. When choosing abortion, you should be 100% certain of your decision before proceeding.

Medication-induced Abortion (Mifepristone and Misoprostol)

A non-surgical abortion procedure using the drugs mifepristone and misoprostol may be used by women who are in the first 10 weeks of pregnancy. This procedure usually allows a woman to have the abortion at home. An ultrasound is done before the procedure. Then, a dose of mifepristone is given at the clinic to take by mouth. The woman is then given misoprostol tablets take as prescribed anytime between 24 and 48 hours later at home. Misoprostol causes the uterus to contract, bleed, and expel the pregnancy. A follow-up ultrasound may be necessary to determine if the abortion is complete. In cases where the abortion is incomplete, vacuum aspiration (see below) is recommended because of the possibility of birth defects should the woman complete her pregnancy.

Research indicates mifepristone alone is not always effective in ending a pregnancy. You may still have a viable pregnancy after taking mifepristone. In 30-50% of women who take mifepristone alone, the pregnancy will continue. Observations have suggested that women who take mifepristone, but not yet

Utah law states women must fulfill the following requirements before receiving an abortion:

- Informed consent requirements: A patient must be given informed consent by a doctor. Doctors are required to provide the woman with abortion information, including required printed materials and a video about abortion, at least 24 hours before the procedure, except in medical emergencies.
- Parental Notification: Minors under 18 years old are required to provide notice of getting an abortion to their parent or guardian if unmarried. If that is not possible or safe, a court can order an abortion without parental consent.
- 72-hour requirement: Women must give face-to-face informed consent and wait 72 hours before having an abortion.
- 2019 Education Module: This is an online educational module that Utah women must complete before having an abortion as of 2019.
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Acton said she urges Utahns to stand their ground and educate themselves about abortion law.

“First of all, don’t be intimidated by Planned Parenthood. They make progress by intimidating states with the cost of litigation and intimidating individuals with the vitriol of pro-abortion slogans and comments,” Acton said.

“Second of all, learn more about abortion, especially in different trimesters. You don’t need to bring up abortion at dinners or parties, but don’t be afraid to take a stand and share what you know when the issue comes up.”

Looking to the future

Women like Acton and Taylor are working to educate Utahns about abortion law, and say they are looking forward to a day when abortion may be limited by the state.

“It’s one thing to be told no by the courts, and it’s an entirely another thing to tell ourselves no because we lack the will to fight injustice,” Acton said. “We should be leading out on this issue. We should be at the front demanding safety for women and protections for the unborn.”

Both Acton and Taylor believe that with better education about abortion procedures and abortion law, more Utahns will take a stand to support legislation limiting abortion like HB 136.

As the abortion fight rages across the United States and lawsuits between states and pro-choice organizations move forward, anti-abortion leaders in Utah believe the tightening of restrictions on abortion are coming.

“Once you wrap your head around the abortion issue, you want it over and done with yesterday. This is the civil rights violation of our time. It’s akin to slavery. To stand by silently allows it to go on,” Taylor said.