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Arizona Legislature OKs abortion medication requirement

By **The Associated Press**



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PHOENIX (AP) — Arizona lawmakers approved legislation that requires abortion providers to tell women they can reverse the effects of a drug-induced abortion and bars women from buying any health care plan through the federal marketplace that includes abortion coverage.

Advocates on both sides of the issue said it's the first time such a reversal requirement has passed in the U.S., though Arkansas also is considering similar legislation. Critics say there's no science to back up the requirement.

The Senate passed the proposal Wednesday on an 18-11 vote. It now heads to Republican Gov. Doug Ducey, who has pledged to defend the right to life but hasn't weighed in on this specific legislation.

The legislation by Phoenix Republican Sen. Nancy Barto was designed primarily to bar women from buying any health care plan through the federal marketplace that includes abortion coverage.

The Center for Arizona Policy, a lobbying group that opposes abortion, backed the proposal to prevent women who receive federal subsidies from being able to buy optional abortion coverage with their plans.

Proponents say those extra premiums don't cover the actual costs and taxpayers end up picking up the tab.

“Our voters overwhelmingly and consistently have said they do not want their taxpayer money going to fund abortions,” Rep. Kelly Townsend, a Republican from the Phoenix suburb of Mesa, said during House debate earlier this week.

About 75 percent of the more than 200,000 Arizona residents who bought insurance policies on the marketplace get a subsidy, according to the latest federal statistics. A gender breakdown isn’t available, but even those who don’t take subsidies will not be able to get that coverage if the bill becomes law.

A House committee amended the legislation last week to include a provision added after an anti-abortion doctor testified that he recently reversed a drug-induced abortion at 10 weeks, though he acknowledged the procedure is not widely known.

“This ability to reverse was not even known until recently,” said Dr. Allan Sawyer, chairman of the bioethics committee at Banner Thunderbird Medical Center.

Allan said doctors can give a woman a drug known as progesterone to stop an abortion after she has taken the first of two medications needed to complete the procedure.

Dr. Kathleen Morrell, an abortion doctor and advocate at Physicians for Reproductive Health, said the procedure is not evidence-based and has not been well-researched.

“It’s experimental. It’s untested, and if we don’t know it works then why are we doing it?” she said. “Show me the evidence, because we have piles of research behind what we’re doing. They don’t have a pile.”

Sen. Kelli Ward, who supported the bill, said the provision respects a woman’s right to make informed decisions, even at the risk of causing birth defects.

“What’s worse, I mean, the people who support abortion want to kill those little babies,” the Republican from Lake Havasu City said.

Democrat Sen. Katie Hobbs, of Phoenix, said the provision will force doctors to misinform their patients.

“I think that is wrong. I think its medical malpractice, and I don’t think we should be inserting that into state statute,” she said.

The legislation does contain an exception allowing insurance in cases of rape and incest. But that exception is problematic, said Rep. Victoria Steele, a Democrat from Tucson.

“That is a cruel joke, because imagine that someone, your daughter, is pregnant as the result of a rape,” Steele said. “They would need to talk to their insurance company to prove they qualify for this exemption? How humiliating, how traumatizing that is.”

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