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Abortion bill clears first of many hurdles

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Reporter - Lauren Adams
Photojournalist - Randall Barnes
Story Created: Thu Jan 26, 2012 6:19 PM
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BENTON, Ky. — The grainy, black and white ultrasound image of an unborn baby is a photograph 51-year-old Rhonda Knees never saw. The beating of a small heart is a sound she never heard.

"Just the sound of the machine," she remembered of the abortion she had at the age of 19. "Inside my head I was actually screaming. I wanted to stop it but I couldn't get the words out."

But she did not. Now decades later, she is a married mother of three.

"I do wonder if the child was a boy or girl and I'm sure the kids wonder what it would have been like to have an older brother or sister," she said.

That's why she supports a pair of bills that would require those considering abortion to have an ultrasound and a face-to-face consultation with a physician.

Senate bills 102 and 103 passed a Kentucky Senate committee Thursday afternoon. They were in part sponsored by Republican State Senator Jack Westwood.

"I'm not even running for re-election. I'm going to be out of the legislature after this year. I have always been profoundly sympathetic and I think we owe it to our children to give them a chance in life," he explained during a phone interview from Frankfort.

Westwood hopes requiring women to see an ultrasound will help change their mind about having an abortion.

But critics of the bills said they are an extreme invasion of privacy and insulting to women by implying they can't make such a difficult decision on their own.

"I think it's degrading to women, demeaning to them that they are looked upon as people who are not able to make a decision for themselves over their reproductive health and their choices," said Ann Ahola.

Ahola serves as director of Louisville's EMW Women's Surgical Center. Even with the proposed restrictions, she said things will not change but just get worse for women.

"Abortions have always happened. They will always continue to happen and we're just providing them in a legal, safe manner."

But Rhonda Knees said it might change a few minds and said she would have been one of them.

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"If I could have actually seen that baby, there's no doubt in my mind I would have said, 'Stop! I'm not going to do this.' I would have."

These bills still have a long way to go. First, they have to pass the full Senate before heading to the Kentucky House and eventually making their way onto the desk of Governor Steve Beshear.

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