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Abortion issue surfaces in Legislature

By TOM CRAWFORD | *Published: FEBRUARY 6, 2007*

A bill that would require women seeking abortions to undergo an ultrasound examination – and would criminally prosecute doctors who don't have it performed — began moving through the legislative process Tuesday with a hearing before the House Judiciary Committee.

Rep. James Mills (R-Gainesville), a Christian conservative, is sponsoring [HB 147](#), the first anti-abortion bill to be actively considered by the General Assembly this session.

SB 147 would require all women seeking an abortion, even if they are victims of rape or incest, to have an ultrasound before the procedure is performed. The patient would not be required to view the ultrasound, but a doctor who performed an abortion without an ultrasound would be punished for a misdemeanor criminal offense.

Anti-abortion advocates support ultrasound requirements in Georgia and other states in hopes that viewing the ultrasound will persuade women to reconsider their decision to seek an abortion.

Mills described his bill as part of a “woman’s right to know” all the information relating to her pregnancy and the condition of the a fetus before an abortion is performed.

“Whether you are pro-life or pro-choice, that is not what this bill is all about,” Mills said at Tuesday’s hearing. “It’s about full disclosure of information.”

In this initial hearing before a House committee, the bill was supported by conservative white males while African-American women questioned the need for it and called the measure “insulting to women.”

“I’m always amazed when a man comes with legislation that can never affect them directly,” said Rep. Nikki Randall (D-Macon). “I also find it to be very insulting to women. This is totally insulting to all women because, believe it or not, we know what’s going on. This is a decision I don’t think any woman takes lightly.”

“It really disturbs me that you would make a statement that says an abortion does not affect a man,” Mills said. For the father of a child that a woman is carrying, “it’s his chromosomes as well as hers,” he said.

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Randall asked Mills if he would accept an amendment to the bill that would require all obstetricians, not just doctors performing abortions, to perform ultrasounds on all their patients.

"Well, that amendment would not be germane," Mills said. "To my limited knowledge, that would not be germane."

Rep. Ed Setzler (R-Acworth) said that by forcing a woman seeking an abortion to undergo an ultrasound, "we're really empowering them to make a decision through this act itself."

But Dr. Carrie Cwiak, a obstetrician with the Emory University school of medicine, said requiring ultrasounds in these circumstances was unnecessary and would add to medical costs.

"There are no significant public health risks that would be addressed by mandating ultrasounds," Cwiak said.

She noted that Medicaid does not pay for ultrasounds during the first trimester of a pregnancy, which is the period when most women seek an abortion.

"It's not required for any pregnancy in the first trimester because it doesn't improve the health of any woman," Cwiak said. "The most effective way to reduce the abortion rate is to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies."

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