

Irish deputies back abortion in limited cases

July 12 2013

Irish lawmakers voted early Friday to back controversial new legislation that will allow abortion in limited cases, after the death last year of an Indian woman due to complications from her pregnancy.

One junior minister quit her post after voting against the bill, the focus of bitter debate in mainly Catholic Ireland. She faces exclusion from the ruling Fine Gael party.

Weary lawmakers voted through the bill, by 127 to 31 against, after marathon discussions on 165 amendments, which ran until 05:00am Thursday and 00:30am Friday (23:30 GMT).

The bill will now go to a vote in the upper house, where the government has a majority.

Abortion laws in Ireland became the focus of global attention and intense debate following the death of 31-year-old Indian woman Savita Halappanavar in a Galway hospital last October.

Halappanavar had sought a termination when told she was miscarrying, but the request was refused as her life was not at risk at the time. She died of [blood poisoning](#) days after miscarrying.

The intense media attention and public outrage following Halappanavar's death encouraged Dublin to introduce legal clarity, rather than guidelines to deal with the European and Supreme Court rulings.

The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Bill allows for abortion in circumstances where doctors certify there is a real and substantial risk to the life of the mother, as opposed to a risk to her health.

The new bill also permits a termination when one [obstetrician](#) and two psychiatrists unanimously agree that an expectant mother is a [suicide risk](#).

The "suicide clause," in particular, has divided society, with some lawmakers taking the view it will lead to a more liberal abortion regime in Ireland.

The bill passed easily in Friday's vote as the [coalition government](#) enjoys a large majority and the support of some members of the opposition.

But Lucinda Creighton, junior minister with responsibility for European Affairs and member of Prime Minister Enda Kenny's Fine Gael party, voted against the government because of her misgivings about the suicide clause.

She immediately resigned her ministerial position, rather than waiting for the next cabinet meeting to sack her and has also been expelled from the parliamentary party.

"I am deeply disappointed to have to vote against the government's abortion bill today," she said.

"I never wished or expected to be expelled from the Fine Gael parliamentary party.

"I feel deeply and strongly that aspects of this bill are based on flawed logic and absolutely zero medical evidence."

Kenny did not allow a free vote on the matter, and already four other government lawmakers have been expelled from the parliamentary party after voting against the bill at an earlier stage.

The bill has caused intense debate with around 35,000 opponents attending a march in Dublin last Saturday.

Kenny revealed recently he had received abusive letters written in blood and opponents of the bill have branded him a murderer.

On the other side of the debate, some have argued that the bill is too limited as it does not allow termination in cases of foetal abnormalities, or in cases of incest or rape.

New figures from the health ministry in Britain released on Thursday show 3,982 women, including 124 under the age of 18, travelled from the Republic of Ireland to England or Wales for a termination in 2012.

Between 1980 and 2012, more than 150,000 women travelled from Ireland to England and Wales for a termination, according to the figures.

If passed in the upper house, the bill will go to the president, Michael d. Higgins, who can sign it into law or refer it to the Supreme Court if he feels it is unconstitutional.

The [bill](#) follows a 2010 European Court of Human Rights ruling that found Ireland had failed to implement properly the constitutional right to abortion where a woman's life is at risk.

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