

Arkansas lawmakers OK ban of common abortion procedure

January 26 2017, by Andrew Demillo

Arkansas is poised to become the third state to ban a commonly used second-trimester abortion procedure under restrictions lawmakers approved Thursday that are expected to face a legal challenge.

The majority-GOP Senate voted 25-6 to ban the [procedure](#) known as dilation and evacuation, which [abortion](#)-rights supporters contend is the safest and most common procedure used in second-trimester abortions. The legislation now goes to the desk of Republican Gov. Asa Hutchinson, who said he will sign it into law as soon as Thursday afternoon.

Arkansas Right to Life has called the prohibition its top legislative priority in Arkansas, and the group's president has called the procedure "barbaric."

"I think this is a humane bill. ... I think it does move us to a more compassionate society," Republican Sen. David Sanders, who co-sponsored the measure, told lawmakers before the vote.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Arkansas says the measure is unconstitutional.

"It's an empty gesture that's going to cost the state tens of thousands of dollars in litigation fees and costs," said Rita Sklar, executive director of the ACLU of Arkansas.

Similar bans are in effect in Mississippi and West Virginia. Those in other states have been put on hold due to legal challenges.

The procedure was used in 683 of the 3,771 abortions performed in Arkansas in 2015, according to the state Department of Health.

The Arkansas law would take effect 90 days after the Legislature formally adjourns its 2017 session, which usually occurs in April or May.

The ban is among a push by abortion opponents nationally and at statehouses around the country with Republicans in control of the White House and Congress. One of President Donald Trump's first acts since taking office has been to massively expand the ban on providing federal money to international family planning groups that perform abortions or provide abortion information. Trump has said he plans on filling a vacancy on the U.S. Supreme Court with an abortion opponent.

Republicans also expanded their majorities in both chambers of the Arkansas Legislature and are expected to consider further restrictions on abortion procedures. They include a proposal that would require that doctors provide care to an infant born in a failed abortion attempt.

The ban on dilation and evacuation was approved on a mostly party-line vote, with three of the Senate's nine Democrats joining Republicans to support the proposal. The majority-GOP House approved the bill earlier this week along similar lines.

"It's as if we want to practice medicine, and if we do, I think we should all go to medical school and become doctors," Democratic Sen. Joyce Elliott, who opposed the bill, said after the vote. "Saying we're going to outlaw something because we disagree with the procedure, that is a [medical procedure](#), is something we just can't get seem to our heads

around."

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