

Pennsylvania lawmakers resume push for 20-week abortion ban

February 6 2017, by Marc Levy

Legislation began advancing in Pennsylvania on Monday to impose new restrictions on elective abortions as backers resumed a push that stalled last year amid a veto threat from Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf and opposition by Pennsylvania's largest doctors' organization.

A party-line committee vote Monday sent the bill to the full Senate. Even though it still requires floor votes in the House and Senate, the bill is expected to eventually reach Wolf's desk. Clear majorities in Pennsylvania's GOP-controlled House and Senate oppose abortion rights, but it is not clear that supporters are numerous enough to override an expected veto.

Wolf, who supports abortion rights, called the bill "radical and unconstitutional" and vowed to veto it.

Last year, a nearly identical version passed the House, 132-65, but it stalled just short of a Senate vote and died.

The primary feature of the bill would ban [elective abortions](#) after 20 weeks from the [pregnant woman's](#) last menstrual period, compared with 24 weeks in current law. As many as 16 states have a similar ban, not including an Ohio law that will take effect in March, according to the nonprofit Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports abortion rights.

Supporters said the 20-week limit reflected medical advances that make

fetuses viable at earlier stages of pregnancy.

In a charged Judiciary Committee debate, Democrats accused Republicans of bypassing hearings on the bill and muscling through confusing legislation that could have consequences for families that are dealing with complicated medical circumstances.

The bill also would ban a procedure it calls a "dismemberment abortion" before 20 weeks and make it a felony to violate it. Supporters said the ban does not apply to a procedure commonly called a dilation-and-extraction procedure, the most common method of second-trimester abortion.

However, a "dismemberment abortion" is not a term used by medical professionals or groups, such as the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and opponents suggested the bill would have the effect of banning the dilation-and-extraction procedure after 20 weeks. Seven states ban the dilation-and-extraction procedure, according to the Guttmacher Institute.

The bill leaves does not remove exceptions for when a physician believes the procedure would save the mother's life or prevent impairment of the pregnant woman's major bodily function. It does not offer exceptions for pregnancies caused by rape and incest.

It also would add a requirement that a medical consultation with a physician be in person before an abortion.

The Pennsylvania Medical Society opposes the [bill](#). In a letter sent to lawmakers last years, the doctors' group said the proposed changes would interfere with the relationship between physicians and patients and set a dangerous precedent by legislating specific treatment protocols.

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