



State House panel approves new regulations for abortions

LANSING -- A package of measures aimed at restricting and regulating abortion practices cleared a key hurdle Thursday in a Michigan House committee and could get a floor vote as early as next week.

Proposals include requiring a doctor or assistant to do screening before an abortion to ensure a pregnant woman isn't being coerced, banning abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy and enacting new regulations related to the disposal of fetal remains.

The Republican-led House panel dealt with the bills that contain pieces of legislation that had been introduced or approved in the Legislature but was introduced in its current form only last week.

Supporters call the measures commonsense and overdue reforms. Critics say the proposals are confusing, contradictory and covered by state laws that aren't being enforced.

Dr. Timothy Johnson, chairman of the obstetrics and gynecology department at the University of Michigan Health System, was one of two physicians to testify at a hearing. Johnson said he found numerous

problems with the legislation, including that it would interfere with the doctor-patient relationship and it lacks an exception for the health of the pregnant woman.

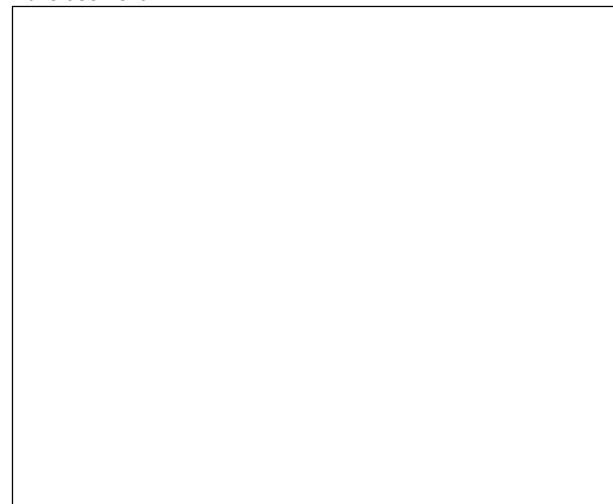
Johnson said he takes issue with the language that would make it a crime to force a woman to have an abortion, because he said a woman is more likely to be coerced into getting pregnant.

"My concern is we'll make Michigan a new center for the war on women," Johnson said.

Rebecca Mastee, a policy advocate for the Michigan Catholic Conference, said the bills would help ensure abortion providers are accountable and held to higher standards. She said the legislation "seeks to protect women from unacceptable and harmful medical practices, facilities and practitioners."

"With this legislation, women will be assured that the abortion facility they enter has been inspected and meets minimum

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state licensing standards, while also being assured that an abortion provider will be physically present, rather than impersonally communicating via the Internet during what is often a stressful time and for which a physical examination is necessary," she said, referring to a proposal that would prohibit doctors consulting by a web camera with patients undergoing a drug-induced abortion.

Lori Lamerand, president and chief executive of Planned Parenthood Mid and South Michigan, said that if the legislation is signed into law the affiliate might have to close two of its centers to comply with the regulations because of the expenses associated with renovating them.

One center, which provides medication abortions, would have to build a surgical operating room to comply. Lamerand expects that very few of Michigan's clinics can remain open if the measures are signed into law.

"This will, in essence, make abortion dramatically less accessible in the state of Michigan," she said.

Republican Rep. Bruce Rendon, sponsor of the one bill, said both sides can come up with unintended consequences from the legislation but he's convinced changes are needed.

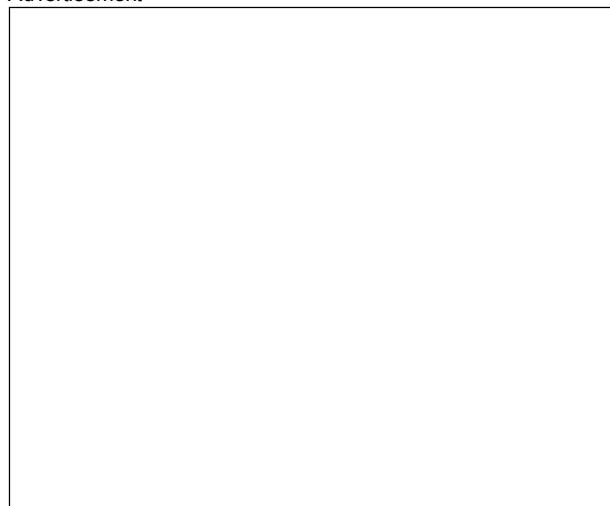
The House could take up the legislation next week; if passed, it would move on to the Senate. Gov. Rick Snyder's spokeswoman, Sara Wurfel, said he will evaluate the proposals as they go through

the legislative process.

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