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N.C. House passes new abortion rules


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BY JIM MORRILL - THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER
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RALEIGH -- Women seeking an abortion would have to first wait 24 hours, get an ultrasound and hear about the risks under a bill passed Wednesday by the state House.

The "Woman's Right to Know Act" passed after a long and emotional debate. It now goes to the Senate and if passed there, to Democratic Gov. Bev Perdue.

The bill passed the House 71-48 largely along party lines. It fell one vote short of a veto-proof majority.



"This is about respecting women," said Rep. Ruth Samuelson, a Charlotte Republican who sponsored the bill. "This bill keeps abortion legal. It keeps abortion safe. And, by golly, we know it helps make it more rare. It is still her choice. It makes it her informed choice."

Opponents called it an unwarranted intrusion on a women's privacy.

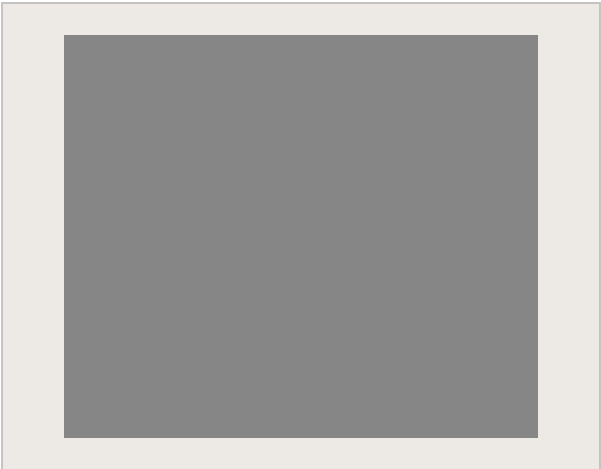
"Today we decide we know better than every woman in North Carolina about her body, her

mind and her soul," said Rep. Rick Glazier, a Fayetteville Democrat.

Perdue joined the criticism.

"The legislature should be focused on what they said they would focus on: creating jobs and strengthening education," she said in a statement. "Government has no role interfering in the relationship between a doctor and a patient. Legislative leaders who vow to make government less intrusive and to protect individual freedom are advancing a bill that does just the opposite."

The bill is one of several efforts that abortion opponents, buoyed by GOP control of the General Assembly, hope will change North Carolina's abortion policies.



HOUSE APPROVES 'CHOOSE LIFE' TAG

The N.C. House gave final approval Wednesday night to a bill that would have it join two dozen other states in offering a "Choose Life" license plate.

The bill, which passed 70-46, would include the anti-abortion tag among 14 additional specialty plates. Most of the money from the \$25 tag would go to non-profits that provide counseling and other pregnancy services, excluding abortion.

Supporters say the tag could help prevent abortions. Critics say it puts the state on a path of allowing political messages on state licenses.

Democratic Rep. Bill Faison of Orange County offered an amendment to add an abortion-rights plate to the mix. The effort failed.

Jim Morrill

N.C. LAW ON ABORTION

North Carolina's current laws on abortion include:

- "It shall not be unlawful, during the first 20 weeks of a woman's pregnancy, to advise, procure, or cause a miscarriage or abortion when the procedure is performed by a physician licensed to practice medicine in North Carolina in a hospital or clinic certified by the Department of Health and Human Services ..."
- "It shall not be unlawful, after the twentieth week of a woman's pregnancy, to advise, procure or cause a miscarriage or abortion ... if there is substantial risk that continuance of the pregnancy would threaten the life or gravely impair the health of the woman."
- "Nothing ... shall require a physician licensed to practice medicine in North

"Choose Life" tag

The House gave final approval Wednesday to a "Choose Life" license tag. The budget approved by both chambers would bar Planned Parenthood from getting federal grants that pass through the state for programs such as teen pregnancy prevention. It also would prevent the state employee health plan from paying for abortions.

But one lawmaker called the 24-hour waiting period "the most important bill on the pro-life agenda."

It would make North Carolina the 26th state to require a waiting period for an abortion. Legislative researchers estimate it would result in nearly 2,900 more births a year in a state where more than 27,000 abortions were performed in 2008.

Along with a 24-hour waiting period, it would require a woman to get an ultrasound and learn about the risks and options. A controversial provision requiring minors to get written consent of a parent or guardian was removed.

In a nearly two-hour debate, most comments came from opponents, who questioned its assumptions, its constitutionality and even its purpose.

"Don't lie to the public," said Democratic Rep. Deborah Ross of Raleigh. "This bill is about shutting down the ability of a woman to get an abortion in North Carolina."

Democratic Rep. Martha Alexander of Charlotte said the bill "does not trust women to make personal decisions."

One of the few supporters who spoke was Republican Rep. Pat McElraft of Carteret County.

In a choking voice, she told a story about a pregnant girl who, told her baby would be deformed, planned to get an abortion. But a last-minute ultrasound showed it wasn't. Now the girl is McElraft's daughter-in-law and the baby, her teenage grandson.

"This is not what woman should go through," McElraft said. "This is not about taking away a woman's right to have an abortion. It's about giving her the information she needs."

Samuelson compared it to the desire by legislators to have all the information they need for a vote.

"When it comes to a decision about abortion, it's also an important decision," she said. "We believe there's a way to address that that respects women and the lives they're carrying."

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Reworked rules governing professional sports agents working in North Carolina are moving through the General Assembly, months after a scandal involving a longtime NFL agent and a University of North Carolina football player.

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Carolina or any nurse who shall state an objection to abortion on moral, ethical, or religious grounds, to perform or participate in medical procedures which result in an abortion. The refusal of such physician to perform or participate in these medical procedures shall not be a basis for damages for such refusal, or for any disciplinary or any other recriminatory action against such physician."

□"Nothing ... shall require a hospital or other health care institution to perform an abortion or to provide abortion services."



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