

South Carolina Lawmakers Approve Controversial Six-Week Abortion Ban, Awaiting Governor's Decision



In a significant development that has sparked intense debate, South Carolina lawmakers voted in favor of a ban on most abortions after the detection of fetal cardiac activity, typically occurring around six weeks. The highly contentious bill, anticipated to be signed by Republican Governor Henry McMaster, received predominantly partisan support, except for the state senate's five female members. These women, comprising three Republicans, a Democrat, and an independent, united in opposition to the ban.

State Senator Sandy Senn, one of the five female senators, expressed concern about the potential consequences of such legislation. She warned that instead of eradicating illegal abortions, the ban would inadvertently lead to increased unsafe procedures. Senn passionately highlighted the possible tragic outcomes, stating, "When ... your teenagers end up dying because they went to get an illegal abortion because they didn't know they were pregnant before six weeks – it is our fault."

The Republican-sponsored bill represents a revised version of an earlier measure that was declared unconstitutional by the state Supreme Court earlier this year. The new ban prohibits most abortions before many women even realize they are pregnant. However, it includes exceptions for cases of rape, incest, and medical emergencies, allowing abortions up to 12 weeks in these specific situations.

If it withstands anticipated legal challenges, one potential consequence of this legislation is the restriction it will impose on women seeking abortions from neighboring southern states with more conservative abortion laws. South Carolina has been a destination for women in such states seeking access to reproductive care. However, with the implementation of the ban, this flow of patients may be significantly curtailed.

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The U.S. Supreme Court's recent decision to overturn the *Roe v Wade* ruling, effectively eliminating a long-standing federal right to abortion, has prompted several southern states to enact stricter abortion regulations. Proponents of the ban in South Carolina argue that it aligns the state's abortion restrictions more closely with those of other southern states. State Senator Shane Massey, a Republican supporter of the ban, asserted during the debate that "South Carolina has become the abortion capital of the Southeast."

Unsurprisingly, abortion rights advocates have strongly opposed the ban, vowing to challenge it in court. Planned Parenthood South Atlantic swiftly responded on Twitter, declaring, "We'll see you in court," minutes after the bill's passage. The outcome of potential legal battles remains uncertain, as the composition of the state Supreme Court has recently shifted toward a more conservative stance with the addition of a new member.

At present, South Carolina permits abortions up to 22 weeks into pregnancy, boasting some of the most lenient abortion laws in the region. The passage of this new ban marks a significant shift in the state's reproductive healthcare landscape, further fueling the nationwide debate on abortion rights and access.

As the bill awaits Governor McMaster's expected signature, its passage signifies a major milestone in the ongoing battle between advocates for reproductive rights and those seeking to impose greater restrictions on abortion. The impact of this legislation on women's access to safe and legal abortions in South Carolina and its potential ramifications for neighboring states will undoubtedly be closely monitored. The outcome of impending legal challenges will likely shape the future of reproductive rights in the state and have broader implications across the country.