Late-Term Abortion Ban in DC?

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In January Republican Senator Trent Franks of Arizona introduced a bill banning abortions performed beyond 20 weeks. This would add the District of Columbia to the list of American states or territories, currently 36, which have some form of late term restriction on abortion.

It did not hit the news at the time because the pro-choice community was embroiled in the Susan B Komen scandal, however now it has become a new site of contention. Now, five months later it is headline news because D C Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton was not allowed to testify on the subject because of her non-voting status.

As pointed out by the Washington Post â€“â€œ[D.C] is notâ€¦the first place to fight such a battle: Five state passed â€œfetal painâ€• abortion laws in 2011, similar to the proposed D.C. law. The restrictions outlaw abortion after 20 weeks on the basis that the fetus could feel pain (the scientific research there is disputed). The antiabortion movement has increasingly rallied behind these restrictions; when Rep. Franks introduced such a ban for the District of Columbia in January, the National Right to Life Committee announced that it would be its top priority in 2012.â€•

Even if the bill passes it will not affect the only late term abortion provider in the area, OBGYN and Pro-Choice Activist Dr. LeRoy Carther, since his clinic is located in Maryland, outside the District of Columbia.

What is really at stake for the Pro-Choice community is whether we want our Nationâ€™s Capitol to fall into the same anti-abortion category. This would be a bad precedent because it feeds into the most conflicted emotions about abortion while relying on questionable science to support the claims the legislation is based on.

It is also important to keep in mind that late-term abortions tend to be a small minority of such procedures: They accounted for 1.3 percent of the 623,000 women seeking abortions after 13 weeks, and found them to have lower levels of education, more likely to be adolescents or have experienced three or more disruptive events in the past year. This just highlights how lack of access can push women into a position where late term procedures become necessary.

Also certain fatal fetal anomalies can only be detected late into the second trimester of a pregnancy. Banning procedures during this time would force women to carry these pregnancies to term â€“ only to have their child died minutes or hours after delivery.

Kliff, Sarah â€œThe Demographics of Late Term Abortionsâ€• In The Washington Post December 17, 2011. http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/ezra-klein/post/the-demographics-of-late-term-abortion/2011/12/17/gIQAQw0u0O_blog.html

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